WEIRDNESS IN WHITBY
VAMPIRES, GOTHS AND HANDS OF GLORY

I MARRIED A STATION! TALES FROM THE WILDER SHORES OF LOVE

UFOS OVER THE PLAYGROUND CLOSE ENCOUNTERS IN SCHOOLS

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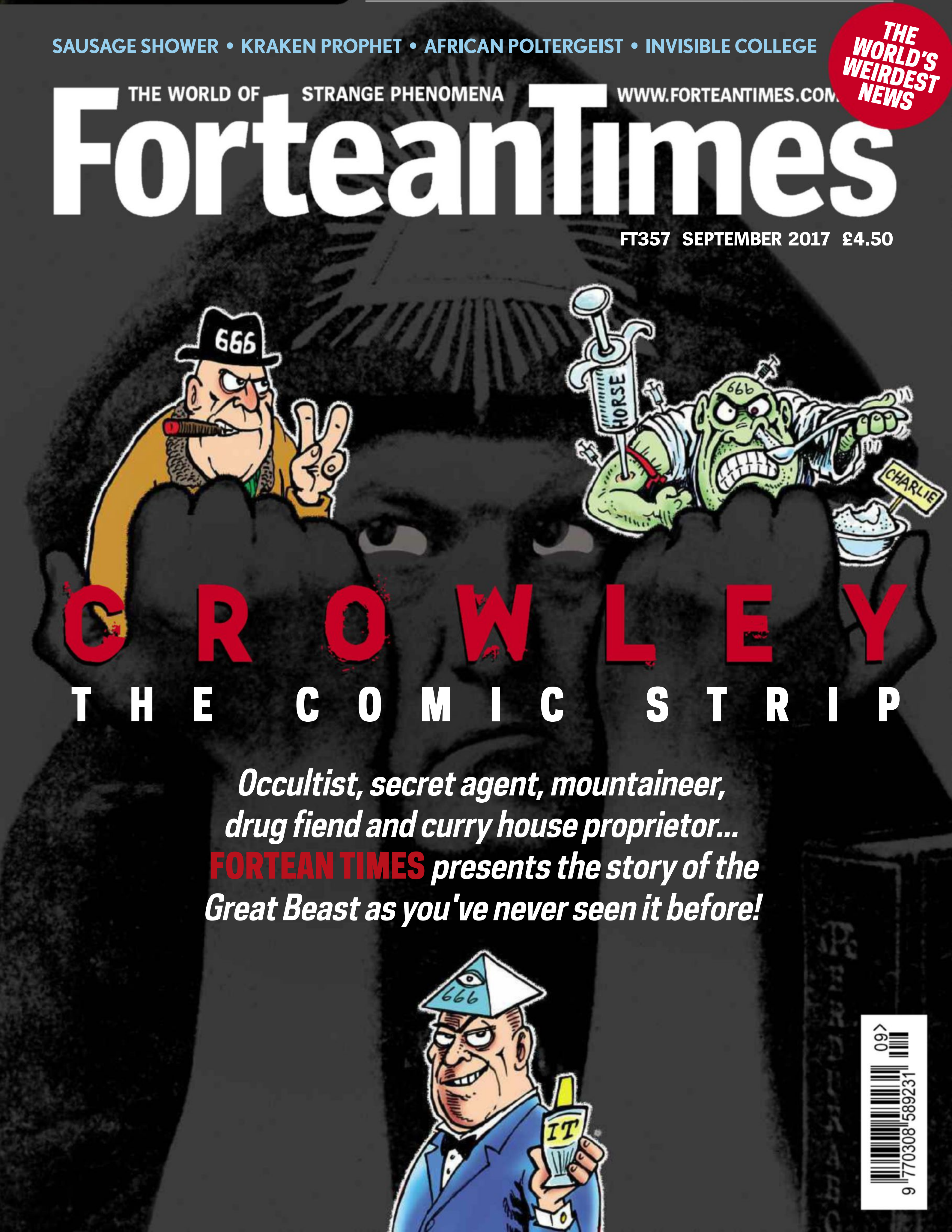

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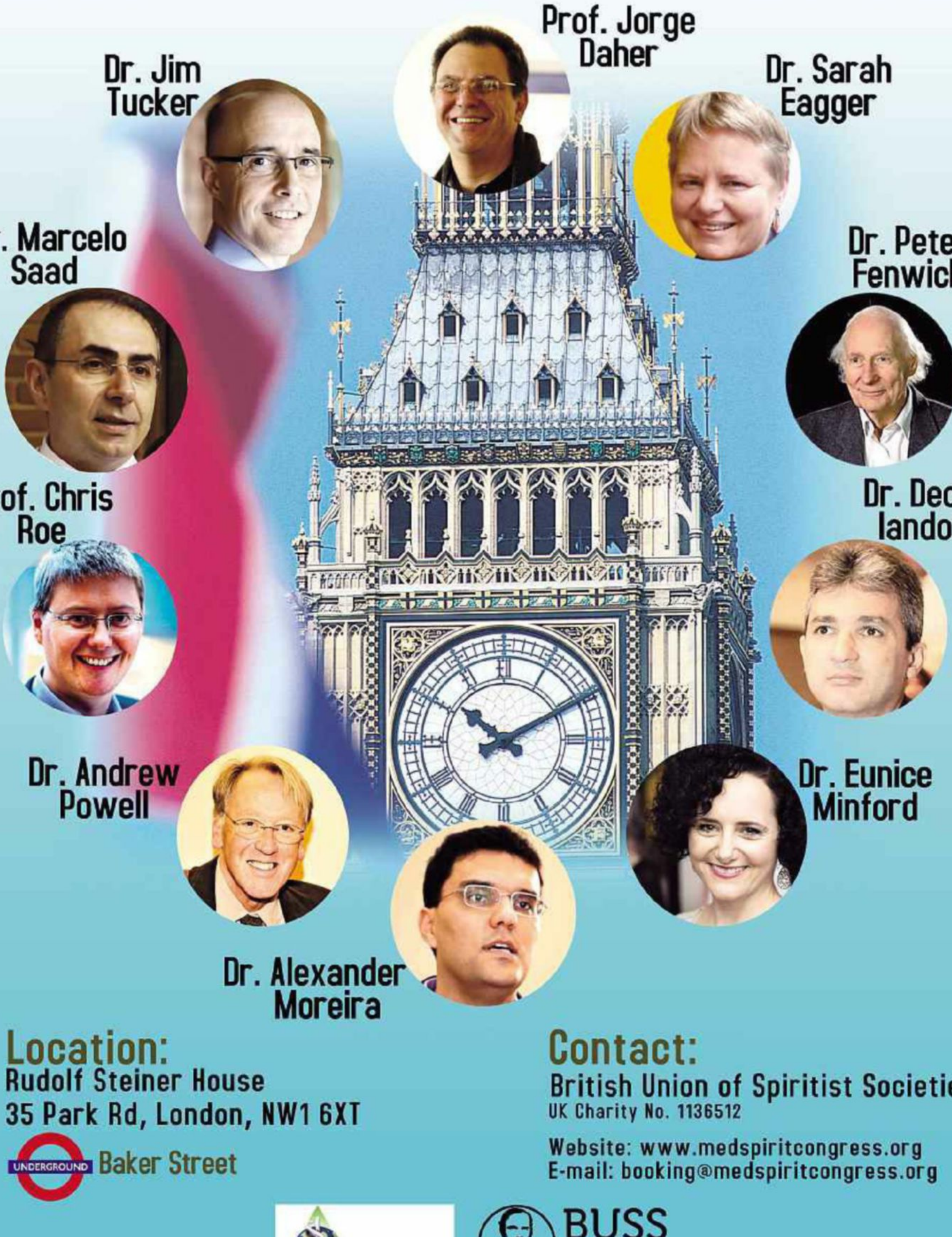

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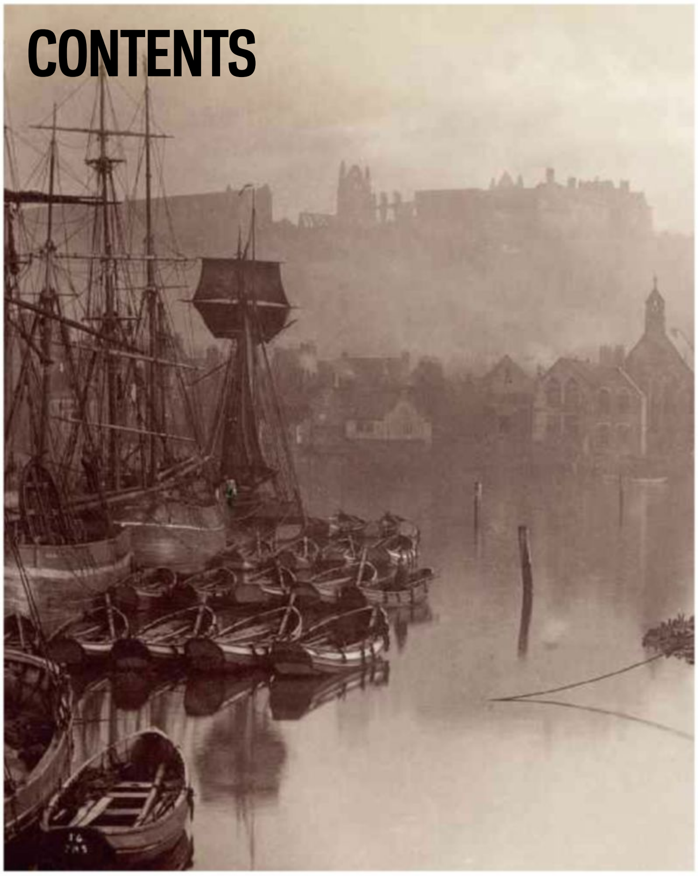

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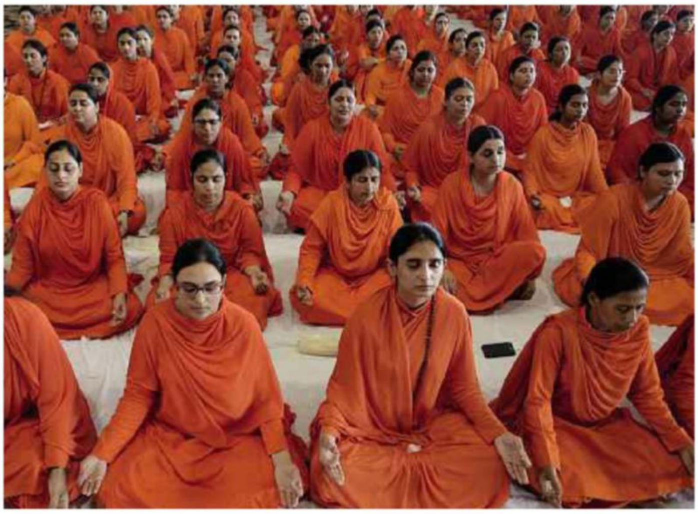

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EDITOR
DAVID SUTTON
(drsutton@forteantimes.com)
FOUNDING EDITORS
BOB RICKARD (bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)
ART DIRECTOR
ETIENNE GILFILLAN
(etienne@forteantimes.com)
BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
VAL STEVENSON
(val@forteantimes.com)
RESIDENT CARTOONIST
HUNT EMERSON

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES
www.managemymags.co.uk
customercare@subscribe@forteantimes.com

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LICENSING & SYNDICATION
FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION – CONTACT:
Syndication Manager
RYAN CHAMBERS TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 4027
ryan_chambers@dennis.co.uk
Senior Licensing Manager
CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3840
carlotta_serantoni@dennis.co.uk
Licensing & Syndication Executive
NICOLE ADAMS TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3998
nicole_adams@dennis.co.uk

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PUBLISHER
DHARMESH MISTRY
dharmesh_mistry@dennis.co.uk
CIRCULATION MANAGER
JAMES MANGAN
james.mangan@seymour.co.uk
EXPORT CIRCULATION MANAGER
GERALDINE GROBLER
geraldine.grobler@seymour.co.uk
SENIOR PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE
MICHAEL HILLS
020 3890 3795
michael_hills@dennis.co.uk

GROUP ADVERTISING DIRECTOR LIFESTYLE
ANDREA MASON
020 3890 3814
andrea_mason@dennis.co.uk
SENIOR SALES EXECUTIVE
BRADLEY BEAVER
020 3890 3722
bradley_beaver@dennis.co.uk
SALES EXECUTIVE
IMOGEN WILLIAMS
020 3890 3739
imogen_williams@dennis.co.uk

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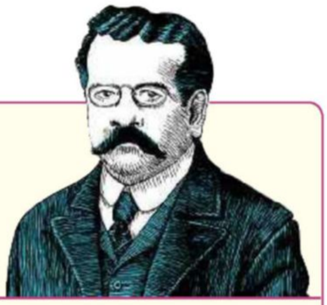
EDITORIAL


CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

GREAT BEASTS, WINGED DEMONS

THE WICKEDEST MAN IN FT

It’s been a long-running joke amiong FT readers that not an issue goes by without mention of a certain Mr Crowley. It’s a joke that our resident cartoonist, the one and only Hunt Emerson, has sometimes cheekily acknowledged in his equally long-running Phenomenomix strip, where the Great Beast has been known to pop up with some regularity. While all efforts to banish the Beast from these pages have failed, it would seem that things have taken a distinct turn for the worse: as well as turning in the final, epic-length instalment in the Lives of the Great Occcultists series on which he and Kevin Jackson have been collaborating, Hunt also sent us the disturbing self-portrait you see on this page. Perhaps 40-odd years of fortean cartooning have taken their toll; perhaps the restless spirit of the Wickedest Man in the World, not content with continuing to influence pop culture at a considerable distance, has possessed the once affable Mr Emerson. What is all too clear is that the Beast walks among us once more!

AVIAN DEVILS OF THE SILLY SEASON

We’ve noted before that certain animal behaviours, when brought to human attention through our increasingly close proximity to one another in urban environments, tend to prompt media-driven social panics. The latest issue of the British Trust for Ornothology’s *BTO News* magazine (Issue 323, Summer 2017) examines just this process, looking at the way the mainstream media have fed the concept of the ‘gull menace’ in its coverage of these sea birds as dangerous, violent and even evil pests. Lisa Carr, of Cardiff University, has tracked such coverage, demonstrating the way that the intersection of “news values… [including] negativity, proximity, continuity, uniqueness and simplicity” with the parliamentary recess of the British summer months (the “silly season”) can lead to a spike in stories demonising animals: in 2012 it was foxes, for example; in 2015, it was gulls (see **FT331:2, 18-19**). Headlines like “Killer Seagulls”, “Gull War Syndrome” and “Seagull pecks dog to death in garden” have a lasting impact: anti-gull vigilantes have been reported in Berwick-upon-Tweed, shootings and poisonings in Sussex and Dorset, and a video showing a young man breaking a gull’s neck (because the birds kept him awake) was posted to social media last year. As Ms Carr suggests, the only way this situation, inflamed by ill-informed media stories, will be improved is by looking at solutions based on sound scientific evidence and not by creating folk devils in the press.

ERRATA

FT352:60: John O Beard of Lancing, West Sussex, writes: “In your review of SD Tucker’s Forgotten Science you refer to Tucker criticising Tesla for believing that *lighting* can cause downpours. Surely he criticised him for believing that it was *lightning* that caused downpours? ”

FT354:10: Proudly pedantic Martin Stubbs of London spotted a scientific blunder, writing: “The newly named element Nihonium has the atomic number of 113, not 13 as printed in Sidelines. Element No 13 is Aluminium, first isolated in 1827.”

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

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PAUL SIEVEKING

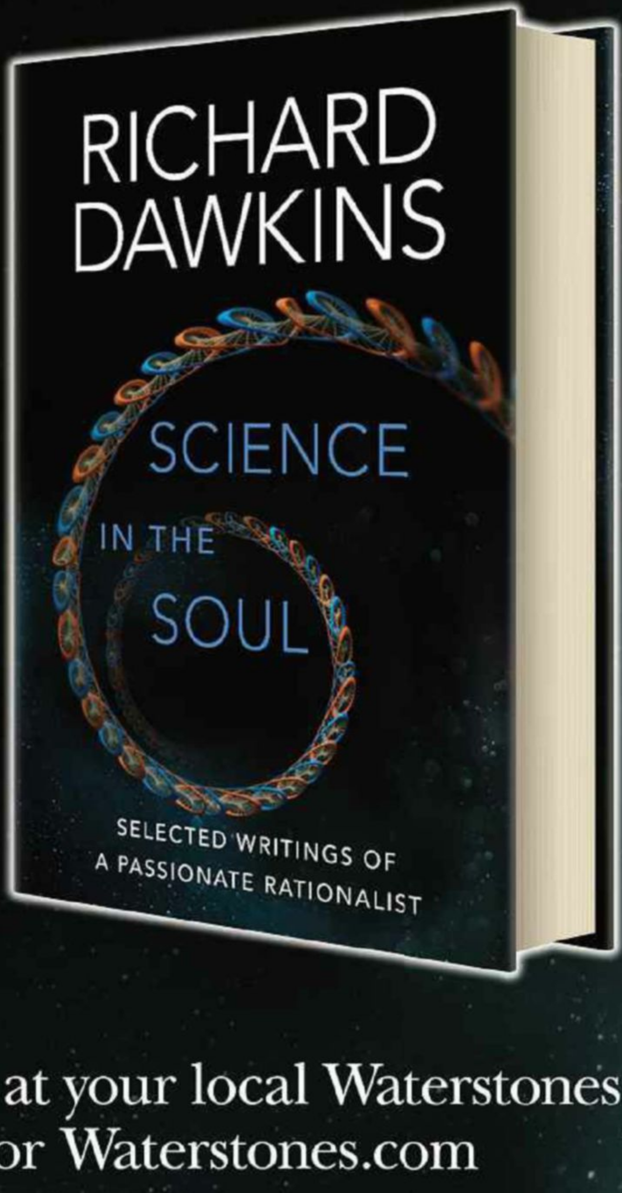
'One of the best non-fiction writers alive today'
Steven Pinker

'Dawkins' incisive thinking on the intellectual world extends far beyond biology'
Daniel C. Dennett

'The perfect embodiment of Nobel quality literature'
Michael Shermer,
author of *The Moral Arc*
and *Heavens on Earth*

'A great wordsmith of our age, a great rationalist'
Matt Ridley,
author of *The Rational Optimist*
and *The Evolution of Everything*

'This Dawkins is a dangerous guy. Like Marx. Or Darwin'
W. Daniel Hillis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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

FOLLOWERS OF FEMALE JESUS BUSTED

More members of the Church of Almighty God arrested as China cracks down on religious cult

The Holy Kingdom Has Appeared
CAG

ABOVE: It's not all beating people to death in McDonalds according to the cult's colourful website...

Police in China have detained 18 suspected members of a banned religious cult. The Church of Almighty God – aka Eastern Lightning – is notorious for some of its members beating a woman to death in a McDonald's restaurant in Shandong in 2014 after she refused to give them her phone number [**FT319:4**]. Eastern Lightning was founded in 1989 by Zhao Weishan, a physics teacher from Heilongjiang province. Adherents believe Jesus has returned to Earth as a middle-aged Chinese woman named Lightning Deng from Henan province, and hold that belonging to the group will save them from an impending apocalypse. After the police put Zhao and his lover Yang Xiangbin on a wanted list in the mid-1990s, the pair travelled to the US on false passports and claimed asylum. They mastermind an organisation with as many as a million members and which is on a ruthless recruitment drive, especially targeting housewives and Christian congregations.

Chinese authorities frequently crack down on the cult, having arrested many of its members over the years. As part of the current detention, police also confiscated computers and books. Heads of the cult preach that the "chosen ones" should be ready to "sacrifice their lives" and that their ultimate goal is to kill the Communist Party, referred to as "the Great Red Dragon". If cultists murder Communist Party members, "the spirit of the Great Red Dragon will no longer possess them," the cult instructs followers. While many Christian sects find it hard to worship freely in China, Eastern Lightning is accused of isolating members from friends and families and pressuring them to donate money in exchange for salvation. "The cult is anti-family, anti-human, anti-government," said one man who went undercover to rescue his wife and father-in-law. "It is constantly training its members to lie to their husbands and wives. They throw away family relationships and encourage each other to do the same. Whoever is more resolute in rejecting their family is given a higher rank. It takes people who are kind and makes them crazy and extreme."

After the 2014 McDonald's killing, several cult members were arrested and two later executed. They had attempted to recruit the 35-year-old victim in the restaurant in the town of Zhaoyuan in May 2014. When she refused to give her phone number, the group believed that she was "possessed by an evil spirit". The group then beat the woman with chairs and metal mop handles. She died at the scene from her injuries. Interviewed in prison later, one of the murderers, Zhang Lidong, said: "I beat her with all my might and stamped on her too. She was a demon. We had to destroy her." China's crackdown on the cult predates the McDonald's murder. There were a string of arrests in 2012 in Qinghhai and Zhejiang where nearly 100 members were sentenced to prison, including several senior members. In 2014, more were arrested in Hubei and Xinjiang. In August 2016 local police in Anhui detained 36 members accused of creating and spreading video content for the cult. *BBC News, 13 Aug 2014; 27 July 2017.*

BLENNIES FROM HEAVEN

Honduras's annual rain of miraculous fish

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BRITAIN'S X-FILES

A Cold War close encounter in Cyprus

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STONED AGAIN

Pelted by a poltergeist in Zimbabwe

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THE CONSPIRASPHERE

When we talk about conspiracy theorists, are we talking simply about political discontents or also those who would question wider 'realities', asks **NOEL ROONEY**

LOSERS AND FAKERS

I went to an interesting talk at the London Fortean Society last week by a leading US academic in the field of political science, Joe Uscinsky. The title of the talk ('Conspiracy Theory is for losers') provoked one dyed-in-the-wool denizen of the Conspirasphere to infiltrate the meeting and attempt to deliver an impassioned, if incoherent, defence of a world view that wasn't actually being attacked (later, outside the venue, I saw him taking off his T-shirt and disguising himself as a real person, but more on that later). In fact Uscinsky's talk was on the whole respectful of conspiracy theorists (he pointed out that Nixon was exposed by a couple of conspiracy theorists), and had some good points to make, at least about political conspiracies and their discontents.

It got me to thinking about whether the Conspirasphere encompasses only those who see evil machinations in the actions and words of governments; I see it as a broader church, a sanctuary for New Agers, ancient alien spotters, maverick scholars and a host of other alternative thinkers (or, rather, people who think about subjects that are loosely labelled as 'alternative' in conscious opposition to an equally loosely labelled 'mainstream'). The academics (and their number is growing exponentially) who study the subject tend to a narrower definition of conspiracy theorists. This can be fruitful – Uscinsky talked about how conspiracy thinking shifts across the political spectrum depending on who is in power, thus neatly debunking the widely-held assumption that the Conspirasphere is home to only right-wingers – but can also miss out on the eldritch ecological riches that a broader taxonomy allows.

Out in the niches of this wider environment is a group of thinkers who start from the assumption that absolutely everything in the 'real' world is, in fact, fake. I regularly enjoy the fruits of this fancifully fertile field of endeavour, while also finding myself irritated at the epistemological implications. Nonetheless, you have to admire the ingenuity with which the real world is dismantled by the more skilful of the 'world as hoax' proponents. Take Miles Mathis; as he pushes his claims that more or less everything you have ever learned is a carefully constructed hoax, he constructs, with equal care, a real 'real' world (there is a worrying little Lacanian Russian doll lurking in the 'real' here, but probably best to ignore it) where secretive, powerful groups of conspirators create, copy, clone and kill celebrities, historical figures and events in an endless and, one can't help feeling, ultimately pointless, carnival of invention.

His take on the death of Buddy Holly (mileswmathis.com/holly.pdf) is a prime example. In a bravura performance (occasionally mad, and, sadly, regularly anti-Semitic) of quirky research and artful use of the unreliable sources available on the Internet, he manages to connect Holly to the English aristocracy, US military intelligence, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Christie's auction house, Charles Manson and Katy Perry. He rubbishes Holly's biography, career, and relationships en route to debunking the circumstances of his death and finally, the fact of his death, in order to prove that the doomed young rocker gave up the drab world of stardom for a life of secret squirrelling for the CIA, and eventual retirement into the banking business. And all Buddy had to do, to effectively disguise himself from the millions of adoring fans was to take off his glasses (which were of course fake to begin with).

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

LIZARDS LIVING THE DREAM

(Queensland) Courier Mail, 30 April 2016.

Sharks not ready to go quietly

Toronto Star, 10 June 2016.

SECOND SEAGULL FALLS INTO VAT OF CURRY

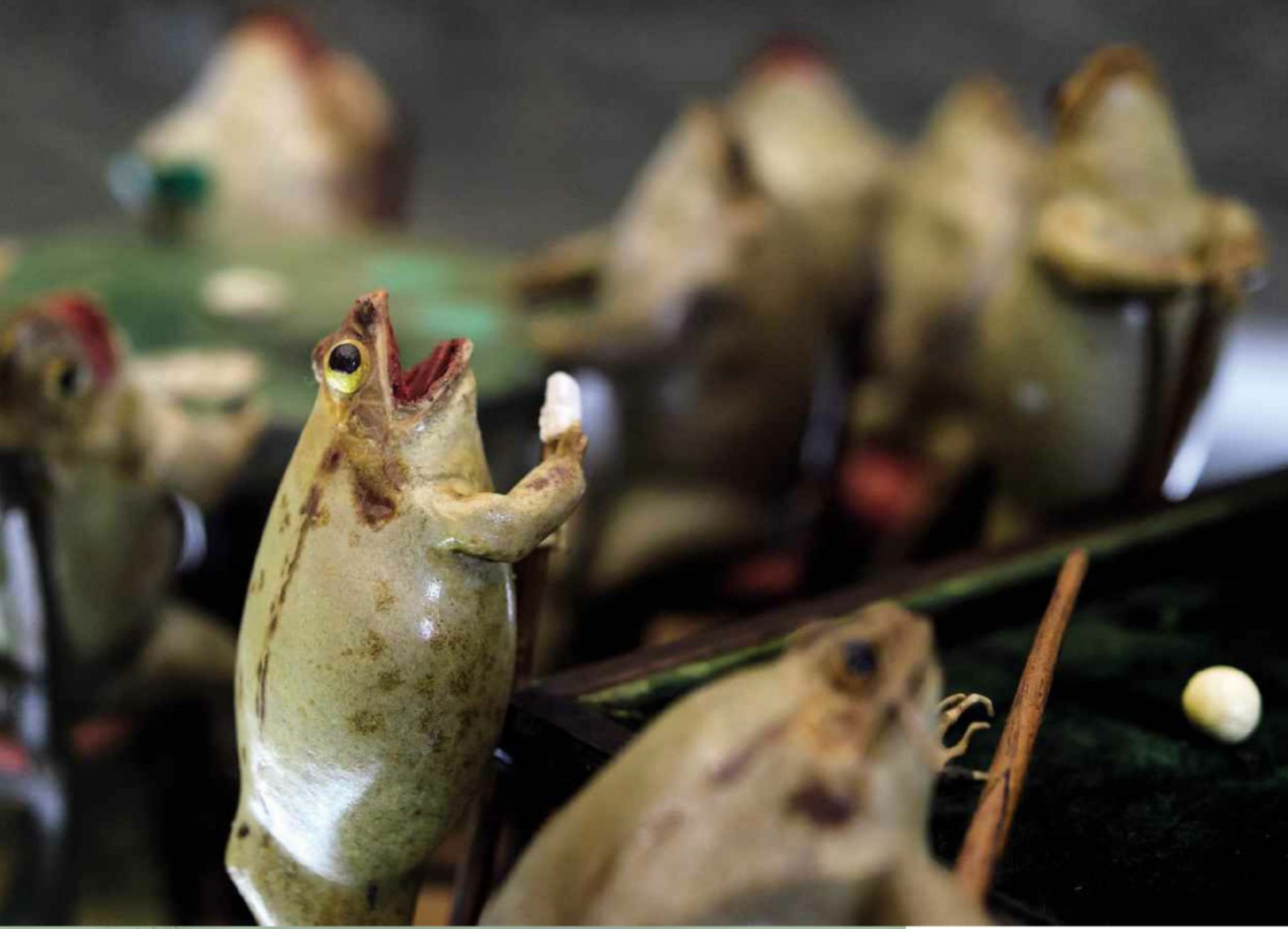
BBC News, 8 Aug 2016.

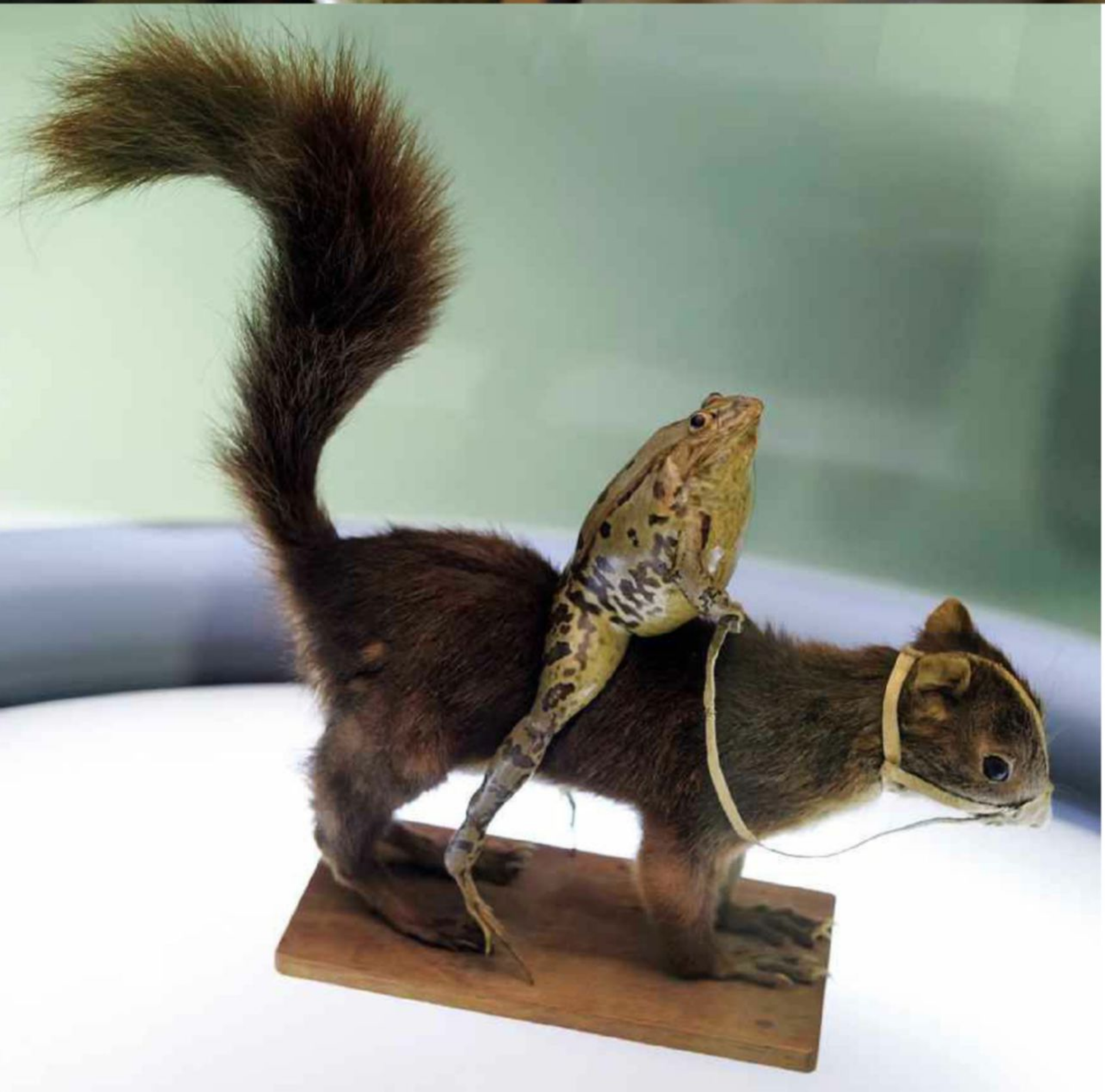
Queen's dung boffins get to bottom of Hannibal Alps riddle in piece of 2,000-year-old elephant poo

Belfast Telegraph (online), 5 April 2016.

BRITAIN HAS MORE UNICORNS THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN EUROPE

Beta News, 20 June 2016.





FROG MUSEUM

The Frog Museum in Estavayer-le-Lac, Switzerland, is one of the country's more unusual visitor attractions, featuring numerous tableaux of everyday life in the 19th century – all enacted by a cast of diminutive amphibians.

The unique collection is attributed to François Perrier, who is believed to have assembled it over a 12-year period between 1848 and 1860. Perrier was a former officer in the Napoleonic Guard who collected frogs on his walks in the countryside, taking them home and stuffing them with sand. The various scenes involve 108 frogs, which are portrayed at school, sitting down to communal dinners, as soldiers in the army, playing games of cards or billiards and, in one case, riding a stuffed squirrel. The Swiss collection, while nowhere near as extensive or elaborate, recalls the celebrated Walter Potter Museum, sadly broken up in 2003 (see **FT306:36-41**), which also featured a number of frogs in its tableaux, alongside kittens, rats, rabbits and birds. The Frog Museum also houses a collection of 200 Swiss railway lamps and a variety of militaria.

www.museedesgrenouilles.ch.

PHOTOGRAPHS: FABRICE COFFRINI/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES

SIDELINES...

DRASTIC CRITICISM

In a bizarre video from China, filmed at a lake in the Chinese city of Jiaozuo, hundreds of silver carp are seen frantically jumping from the water, many to their own demise, as the person filming exclaims in amazement. Residents feared that the 'mass suicide' was a sign of an impending earthquake or some other disaster. However, the authorities insisted the carp were perturbed by a singing competition that was being held nearby and apparently startled the skittish fish. *coasttocoastam.com, 19 June 2017, via D.Star.*

NOTTINGHAM ROAR

A mysterious noise, apparently emanating from the sky and described as a "roaring" or "whooshing" sound, puzzled residents throughout Nottingham every few minutes during the night and early morning hours on 27 and 28 May. Hayley Compton said it sounded like a giant blowtorch. Popular explanations included UFOs and noises generated by industrial machines at nearby factories, though none had been identified. Meanwhile, similar noises were heard around the same time in nearby Derbyshire. *Nottingham Post, 29 May; mysteriousuniverse.org, 30 May 2017.*

SURPRISE BURIAL

A badger in Utah's Grassy Mountains has been captured on camera burying the carcase of a cow – previously unrecorded behaviour – in an astonishing display of digging prowess. Calves weigh about 23kg (50lb), while male badgers weight on average 8.6kg (19lb). *Guardian, 1 April 2017*.

MARTIN ROSS

THE WILDER SHORES OF LOVE

CATERS NEWS

TOP: Carol says she and Santa Fe station were wed in 2015, although the marriage has not been officially recognised.

OBSCURE OBJECTS

Carol, 45, says she's been smitten with Santa Fe station in California since she was a young girl, and so decided to make her relationship with the place official. The nuptials have not been officially recognised by the government, but Carol says she and the station tied the knot in late 2015, and they have been very happily wed ever since. "When we got married, I stood there and I told her that I take it as my partner," says Carol, who calls the station 'Daidra'. "It was the happiest day of our lives." She visits the station every day, travelling 45 minutes by bus to visit her spouse. "When I get there I say hello to her – I then walk around the block circling around her, trying not to let anyone notice I am talking," she says. "There is a private bit where two walls meet, I go there to touch her, which I do by leaning against her with my clothes on. When I'm touching her, I feel as though it actually holds me and kisses me. I don't have physical sex with the station in public, I want to be respectful. I wouldn't do that with a human in public so why would I do it in this case?"

Carol identifies as 'Objectum-Sexual', a form of sexuality focused on specific inanimate objects. The term was first coined by Eija-Riitta Berliner-Mauer, a Swedish woman who claimed to be "married" to the Berlin Wall from 1979 until her death in 2015 [**FT240:22**]. In 2008 an American woman named Arika made headlines after "marrying" the Eiffel Tower. She later founded the organisation OS Internationale, for others who identify as Objectum-Sexual. There are thought to be around 40 OS woman in the world, many of who also have Asperger's Syndrome. According to psychotherapist Jerry Brooker, OS women are motivated by a need for control. "Someone who falls in love with objects can control that relationship on their own terms," he told the makers of a documentary on the subject. "Their objects will not let them down. That is extremely attractive for a person who is otherwise often desperately lonely." *telegraph.co.uk, 26 May 2017.*

> *Carol says she and the station have been very happily wed*

For "car lovers", see **FT73:24, 126:12, 240:22, 331:10, 337:8**. We should also not forget Carl Watkins, the man who had sex with pavements [**FT73:14, 93:15**] and Ross Watt, whose obscure object of desire was a traffic cone [**FT166:12**]

ON THE FENCE

A woman in North Austin, Texas, called police on 8 March to report her neighbour "outside her window having sex with a fence". She saw Eleodoro Estala, 32, urinating on the side of the fence that separates their property. When he saw her filming him with her cell phone, he took off his clothes, put his mouth on the chain link fence and stuck his tongue out, and then began to "have sex with the fence". When police arrived, Estala appeared to be intoxicated. *Austin American-Statesman, 6 Mar 2017*

LOST IN THE AMAZON

Kevin Chapman, 33, of Ashford in Kent, dropped his trousers in Canterbury city centre last March and pretended to have intercourse with a blue Suzuki motorbike. He also pushed and kicked the bike. In Folkestone magistrates' court he admitted dropping his trousers, but denied indecent exposure and claimed he was pushed into the bike by tramps. *Sun, 14 April 2017.*

DOGGY STYLE

Carol Bowditch, 64, of Evedon in Lincolnshire was filmed having sex with three different breeds of dogs: a St Bernard, a black labrador and an Alsatian. "When the defendant was interviewed she admitted she had penetrative sex with dogs," Victoria Rose, prosecuting, told Lincoln Crown Court. "She accepted it had taken place over several years. She was unaware it was illegal." She was given a community order with 12 months supervision and a 16-week nocturnal curfew. Daniel Galloway, 65, who filmed her, was to be sentenced at a later date. *Lincolnshire Echo, 13 April 2017.* For other cases of bestiality, some quite bizarre, see **FT331:10, 337:8**.

LOST IN THE AMAZON

Investigating noises in his cattle barn on 18 March 2016, a farmer in Plumbridge, Co Omagh, Northern Ireland, discovered Anthony Morris, 44, wearing a balaclava, a vet's rubber inspection glove and carrying a wooden brush shaft. The farmer and his brother pinned him down until police arrived. While he was being held, Morris, who had a torch strapped to his head and was also carrying blue rope and a penknife, put on a foreign accent and said: "Me-me-steal-ear-tags. Me-me-look-at-tags." But when police arrived they unmasked Morris, whom the farmer recognised because he'd done work for him in the past. He was also wearing a body warmer stolen from the farmer's lorry weeks earlier.

During his trial, Morris came up with a host of weird excuses. These included: his balaclava, made from the leg of old tracksuit bottoms, was a "face warmer" he had lifted by mistake instead of a woollen cap; the wooden shaft was to help him keep his balance because medication made him dizzy; the rubber glove was already in the body warmer and he used it to clean fungi out of a water barrel; and he always carries a penknife to open food for his 17 cats. He was originally questioned about cruelty to animals but none of the cattle was injured. He blamed his presence in the barn on a mystery man who Morris said "forced" him to go to look at ear tags on the cattle because he said the farmer had stolen three cows from him. Morris said the unnamed man who was "a blast from the past" had threatened his 14-year-old son with a gun. Morris claimed to be totally blind in one eye and partially sighted in the other. He said that he can only see "black blobs" and was diagnosed with limited sight in 2005; nevertheless, he had managed to keep riding a motorbike. *Belfast Telegraph, 26 Mar 2013.*

WIRED FOR SEX

Kurt Allen Jenkins, 56, was arrested in Boyton Beach, Florida, on 31 October 2016. While parked near Citrus Gove Elementary School, he had reportedly "made sexual advances" to a 44-year-old man walking by, before opening the passenger door of his white Toyota so the man could climb in. The man declined the offer and snapped a picture of Jenkins naked behind the wheel with wires attached to his genitals. Jenkins was later arrested for lewd behaviour. *Palm Beach (FL) Post, 2 Nov 2016.*

LEFT: Karl Allen Jenkins – wired up and ready for action.

CEMENTING RELATIONS

John Steven, 38, turned up at Sharon Kerr's flat in Glasgow to have concrete poured on him for a sexual thrill. He had heard she had access to a cement truck and was expecting to pay her £150. However, he was ambushed by Craig Dalton and Matthew Harrison, who taped his eyes and discussed chopping him up with a machete. He suffered a collapsed lung and slash wound in the attack. *Sun, 9 Feb 2017.*

LIKE MOTHER'S MILK

A regression therapist who manipulated clients into sucking her breasts during sessions was jailed for four years. Former Christian cult leader Vanessa Clark, 63, of New Yatt, Oxfordshire, told one woman she need "mummy's milk" as she guided her mouth to her nipple. She massaged another victim's breasts until the client became sexually excited. "Ms Clark reassured her this was her 'inner baby' coming out and she 'needed this'," said prosecutor Henry James. "Ms Clark would then massage the woman's foot before pushing her own foot into the victim's groin." Clark admitted six assaults, carried out between 1996 and 2001. She charged thousands of pounds for her "skin to skin" methods. *Metro, Sun, 11 Dec 2015.*

WALK IN THE PARK

Martin Todd was walking in Ninesprings Country Park near Yeovil in Somerset on 26 February when, in the middle of a footpath, he came across a pair of synthetic breasts, some lingerie, a wig, an outfit and a bottle of lubricant. "It was rather strange, I must admit," he said. *Western Gazette, 9 Mar 2017.*

SIDELINES...

SNAP

A brother and sister broke the same wrist bone in separate incidents during PE lessons 10 minutes apart. Sam Ryan, 12, suffered a buckle fracture. As his mother Louise (a solicitor from Stockport, Greater Manchester) went to take him to hospital, she got a call to say Connie, nine, had taken a tumble at her primary school. *Sunday Mirror, 12 Mar 2017.*

TEARFUL CONGRESS

An Indian judge has declared that peacocks, the country's national bird, are too holy to reproduce naturally, but sire their offspring through tears. "A peacock is a lifelong celibate," said Justice Mahesh Chandra Sharma of the Rajasthan High Court. Peahens fall pregnant after swallowing the peacock's tears. The comments provoked derision on social media and several videos of the birds mating were posted. *Times, D.Telegraph, 2 June 2017.*

SEA SERPENT HUNT

A police patrol armed with machine guns and dynamite hunted a sea serpent in Rio de Janeiro's Guanabara Bay on 11 February 1958. Hundreds of people claimed to have seen the monster, which had the neck of a giraffe, humps on its back and a long tail. A fisherman described it as a huge greenish serpent with a head "as big as a barrel". *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 12 Feb 1958.*

CHAMPION PEARL

A New England student found a rare 16.64-carat Quahog pearl while shelling a £20 bag of clams that he bought at a market in Brookline, Massachusetts. The purple-hued pearl was thought to be worth around £25,000 – the largest Quahog pearl ever offered at auction. *<i> 10 Dec 2016.*

BRAVE NANNY WANTED

A couple living in the Scottish Borders are offering £50,000 a year for a nanny. They have two children, aged five and seven, and have had five nannies in the past year who blamed their departure on "spooky" happenings, such as strange noises and moving furniture. The family have not experienced any "supernatural" events themselves. *Western Mail, 14 June 2017.*

SIDELINES...

LEGLESS RATS

Last year, the eastern Indian state of Bihar banned the sale and consumption of alcohol. Police arrested more than 40,000 people for illegally keeping alcohol in their homes and shops, and seized more than 900,000 litres (200,000 gallons) of booze, which was stored in police stations across the state. On 2 May it was announced that rats had nibbled off the metal caps of thousands of the seized liquor bottles and 'guzzled' the contents. *BBC News, 5 May; Irish Independent, 6 May 2017.*

OXFORD BOA

On 18 March, a dog walker found an 8ft 6in (2.6m), 27lb (12.2kg) boa constrictor lurking in grass near a housing estate in Banbury in Oxfordshire. Its provenance was unknown. The RSPCA said the female reptile was doing well, despite the cold weather. *BBC News, 21 Mar; D.Mail, 23 Mar 2017.*

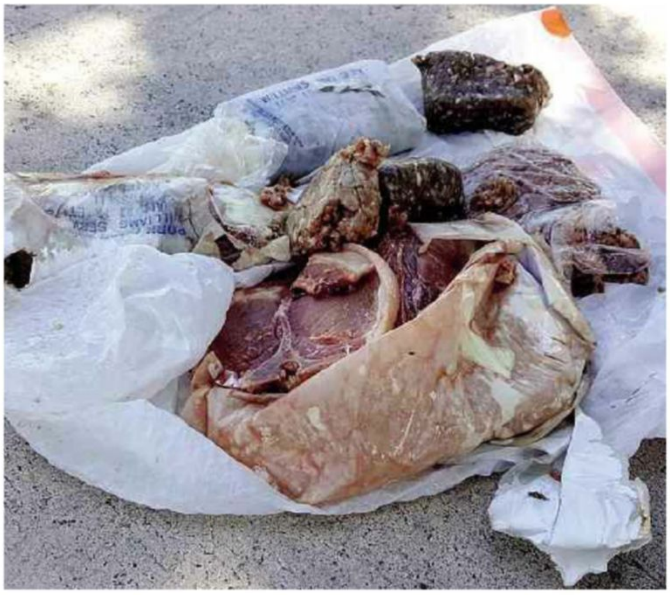
RIDING THE STORM

Cowering in her bathtub as a storm hit her house in Smithland, East Texas, on 21 January, Charlesetta Williams, 75, heard a 'poof' as the roof flew away. Then Mrs Williams and her son Rickey, 40, rode inside the bathtub through a tornado 800 yards wide blowing at 130mph (209km/h). It deposited her virtually uninjured, still hiding beneath a quilt inside the tub, among trees 20ft (6m) from her house. Rickey was thrown clear. *Washington Post online, 21 Jan; Times, 26 Jan 2017.*

MARTIN ROSS

FALLING FOOD

Honduras's annual rain of fish and a shower of frozen sausages in Florida



ABOVE: Some of the mysterious pork products that landed on Travis Adair's roof.

FISHY MIRACLE

In late spring or early summer every year for the last century or so, hundreds of small silver fish are said to have fallen during torrential downpours over La Unión (pop. 93,000), a community on the periphery of Yoro, a farming town in north-central Honduras. After heavy rain, a sunken pasture is suddenly covered with still-living fish. The fall has shifted location slightly from time to time; it migrated to the pasture near La Unión about a decade ago. The harvest becomes a communal affair for La Union's 200 or so homes, and everyone shares in the bounty. Those who collect the most redistribute their fish to families who are unable to get to the field in time to collect their share. Peddling the catch is prohibited. In the 1970s, a *National Geographic* team witnessed the fish on the ground.

Scientists are said to be baffled; the fish are not local but may be coming from the Atlantic about 45 miles (72km) away, possibly carried by waterspouts, although none have been observed at the time of precipitation – and why would they fall in the same region so regularly? Nobody has actually seen a fish fall from the sky, but residents say this is only because nobody dares leave home during the kinds of powerful storms that bring the fish. Some have suggested that the fish live in underground rivers and are actually being forced up by flooding. This hypothesis is supported by the 1970s *National Geographic* team's finding that the fish are blind. But why should the phenomenon be repeated annually at roughly the same time of year?

> *The story goes that a Spanish priest prayed for three days and nights that God should provide sustenance*

Local people say it's a miracle. The story goes that a Spanish priest, Father José Manuel de Jesús Subirana – who arrived in Honduras in 1855 and worked there until his death in 1864 – prayed for three days and three nights that God should provide sustenance for the poor. In answer to his prayer, a dark cloud appeared and fish rained from the sky. This wonder is repeated every year – sometimes twice a year. A *lluvia de peces* (rain of fish) festival was inaugurated in 1998, with a parade carrying effigies of Father Subirana through the streets. The priest's remains are buried in the church on Yoro's central square. Young women compete to be elected Señorita Lluvia de Peces; the winner of the pageant rides a float dressed like a mermaid. *atlasobscura.com, wikipedia; nytimes.com, 16 July; breakingisraelnews.com, 19 July 2017.*

SAUSAGE FROM THE SKY

At 4am on 15 July 2017, several bundles of frozen pork sausages, weighing 15lb (6.8km) in total, landed on the roof of Travis Adair's house in Deerfield Beach, Florida. Adair thought the "big bang" was thunder, but his wife Jennie went outside and found two bundles of sausages next to the house. Then his son Austin found three on the roof. "It had to fall from the sky," Adair said. "It was too heavy to throw on the roof." The house is near three airports, suggesting the meat fell from a plane. However, the Federal Aviation Administration made no immediate comment.

Labelling on the package showed it originally belonged to Jim Williams, who lives 170 miles (270km) away in Myakka City. Williams, who owns a company that prepares fields for planting, said he bought some pigs from some children at a county fair last January. He kept much of the meat and gave some away but he has no idea how any of it ended up on the Adairs' roof. He is not a pilot and doesn't own a plane. "I would have thought 15 pounds of frozen meat falling from an airplane would have put a hole in the roof," he said. As for the meat, the Adairs threw it away – though Williams had offered to throw the family a barbecue. *local10.com, 17 July; [AP] 20 July 2017.*

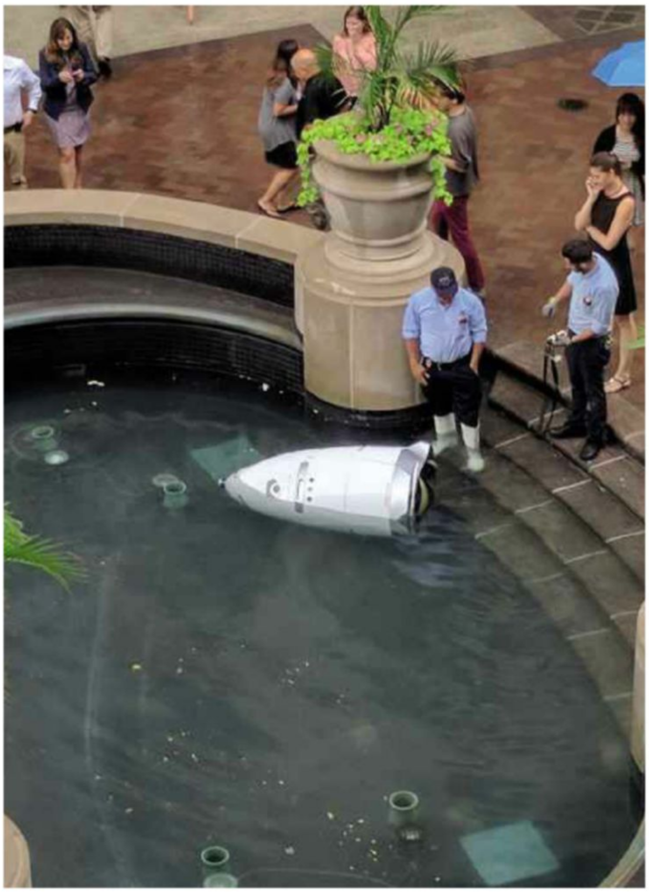
TECH UPDATES

Suicidal security robot meets watery end while drones boost crop circles

ROBOT 'DROWNS'

A security robot in Washington DC suffered a watery demise after rolling into a fountain and 'drowning' by an office building at the Georgetown Waterfront in Washington (DC) Harbour. The stricken robot, made by Knightscope, was spotted by passers-by whose photos of the aftermath quickly went viral on social media. For some, the incident seemed to sum up the state of 21st century technology. "We were promised flying cars, instead we got suicidal robots," wrote one worker from the building on Twitter. "Steps are our best defence against the Robopocalypse," commented Peter Singer – author of *Wired for War*, a book about military robotics.

It is not the first accident involving Knightscope's patrolling robots, which are equipped with various instruments – including face-recognition systems, high-definition video capture, infrared and ultrasonic sensors. Last year, a 16-month-old toddler was run over by one of the autonomous devices in a Silicon Valley shopping centre. And earlier this year, a Californian man was arrested after attacking a Knightscope robot. The man, who was drunk at the time of the incident, later said he wanted to "test" the machine, according to Knightscope. *BBC News, inews.co.uk, 18 July 2017.*



BILAL FAROOQUI / TWITTER

Never Forgotten
In Loving Memory of our Security
our friend

OLIVER GRISWOLD / TWITTER

ABOVE AND LEFT: The Georgetown Waterfront robot's sad end quickly gave rise to a spontaneous memorial.

DRONES BOOST CROP CIRCLES

A recent surge in crop circles is being caused by drone users who upload their aerial footage on social media, according to Wiltshire Police. So far this year the force had been alerted to 16 incidents, with a recent circle in Alton Barnes measuring 200 acres (sic) in diameter. However, the true number is thought to be far higher because many farmers do not come forward.

"Creating a crop circle is criminal damage and an offence," said rural crime officer Marc Jackson. "Often immediately after a crop circle appears, people will arrive with a drone to photograph it. Individuals using a drone in the immediate time after a crop circle may be connected to the group who have created the circle. The footage is quickly circulated on social media to generate interest and on websites that charge for advertising space. It has also been known for individuals to pose as part of a charity or as the landowner at the site of crop circles and attempt to take 'donations' from people viewing it." PC Jackson added that the damage results in a significant loss of revenue for farmers, who are also forced to deal with trespassers who later flock to view them.

Drone users are supposed to obtain permission from the Civil Aviation Authority to operate drones for commercial purposes. The CAA said that permission had been granted to 2,897 operators to use drone for commercial purposes, almost a six-fold increase from about 500 just two years ago. *D.Telegraph, 13 July; Times, 14 July 2017.*

SIDELINES...

SNAKING BAD

A "very aggressive" 6ft (1.8m) python was weaned off crystal meth at a prison rehab centre in Windsor, south of Sydney, Australia. Police discovered the reptile when they raided a crystal meth lab. It had absorbed drug fumes and particles through its skin and was "totally on edge". *(London) Eve. Standard, 12 April 2017*.

PROTECTIVE BEARDS

Metropolitan Kornily, Primate of the Russian Orthodox Old Believer Church (RPSC), has called on Russian men to stop shaving to "protect themselves from homosexuality." The whimsical cleric explained: "God set down certain rules. The Lord created everyone with a beard. No man can resist his creator." The RPSC split from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1666 after protesting against reforms made by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow. *themoscowtimes.com, 19 June 2017.*

PHENOMENAL FLIGHT

A polystyrene model plane with a 21in (53cm) wingspan, launched by five-year-old Tamara Lee from Menai Suspension Bridge in Wales last March, was found 150 miles (240km) away in Charnwood Forest, near Leicester. *D.Telegraph, 6 May 2017.*

SPLASHING OUT

Water "harvested" from the icebergs of Svalbard, an archipelago between northern Norway and the North Pole, is being marketed as a "sophisticated alternative" to the finest wines – at only £77 a bottle. It is said to have formed from snow that fell up to 4,000 years ago. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 21 Feb 2017*.

BEASTLY BITER

Luis Arroyo, 40, was sentenced to seven years in prison after punching his girlfriend and biting the head off her two-month-old Chihuahua puppy in the mountain town of Lares, Puerto Rico, on 4 February. He was also fined $3,000. *BBC News, 28 Mar 2017.*

JUST NOT FUNNY

Nude squatter Mae Farrington, 36, was arrested by Deputy Dick Wang when she refused to leave a property in Big Pine Key, Florida. *D.Star, 19 May 2017.*

SIDELINES...

WINGED WONDER

Tracking devices have revealed that an Arctic tern covered 60,000 miles (96,560km) in a year, travelling almost all the way from one pole to another and back again. The direct route would have been 25,000 miles (40,230km) but the tiny seabird did far more as it sought rest stops and battled winds. *Sunday Times, 16 April 2017*.

ROOT SCAM

The dried penises of Bengal monitor lizards and yellow monitor lizards, both on India's endangered species list, are being passed off in online trade as a plant root used in religious rituals. The rare root is believed to bring good luck, but has all but vanished from the Indian countryside. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 21 June 2017*.

DEADLY TONIC

A 29-year-old man who drank powdered lead after reading in ancient Chinese alchemy books that it would boost his health almost died. He was admitted to hospital in Taizhou, eastern China, with severe liver damage and anæmia. He was expected to make a full recovery. *Metro, 24 May 2017*.

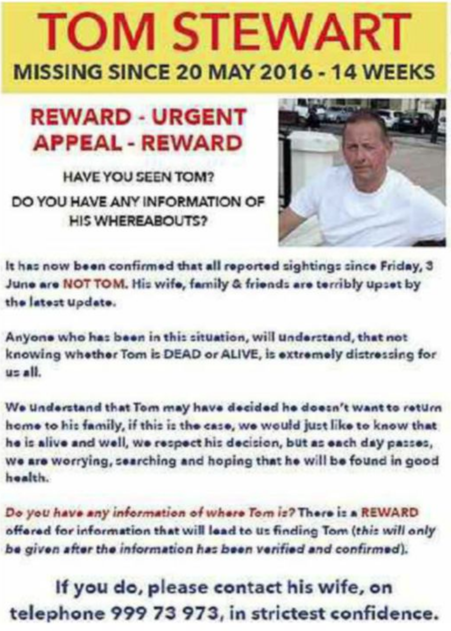
AVIDA DOLLARS

Pilar Abel, 61, a fortune-teller from Salvador Dalí's home town of Figueres in Catalonia, believes she is the product of a "clandestine love affair" between her mother Antonia and the surrealist in 1955. A Spanish judge has now ordered the exhumation of the artist's body for DNA testing. Ms Abel hosted a tarot-card reading show on local television. She denies wanting a slice of the £265 million Dalí estate. Awkwardly, Dalí famously preferred voyeurism to actual sex. *Metro, D.Mail, D.Mirror, 27 June 2017*.

MARTIN ROSS

INTO THIN AIR

Man goes missing on Malta and disappearing woman baffles West Yorkshire Police...



TOM STEWART

MISSING SINCE 20 MAY 2016 - 14 WEEKS

REWARD - URGENT APPEAL - REWARD

HAVE YOU SEEN TOM?

DO YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION OF HIS WHEREABOUTS?

It has now been confirmed that all reported sightings since Friday, 3 June are NOT TOM. His wife, family & friends are terribly upset by the latest update.

Anyone who has been in this situation, will understand, that not knowing whether Tom is DEAD or ALIVE, is extremely distressing for us all.

We understand that Tom may have decided he doesn't want to return home to his family, if this is the case, we would just like to know that he is alive and well, we respect his decision, but as each day passes, we are worrying, searching and hoping that he will be found in good health.

Do you have any information of where Tom is? There is a REWARD offered for information that will lead to us finding Tom (*this will only be given after the information has been verified and confirmed*).

If you do, please contact his wife, on telephone 999 73 973, in strictest confidence.

LEFT: Tom Stewart went missing in Malta over a year ago and has not been seen since. **ABOVE**: Svitlana Krasnoselska vanished without trace in April 2017.

A year ago, the last time Phyllis Stewart saw her husband Tom, he was climbing up an orange tree and clambering over the 8ft (2.4m) high wall of a Maltese hospital. He had no money, phone, passport or medication for his type-two diabetes. Since then, there have been only a couple of possible sightings of him on the tiny island – despite the fact that, at 6ft 5in (196cm), he would stand out in any crowd. The 60-year-old had voluntarily entered Mount Carmel Hospital, which deals with mental health, on 21 May 2016, under the advice of a doctor, but abandoned it two days later. "He kept asking to go for a walk in the hospital's garden," said Phyllis, 69. "Then he turned to me and said, 'This isn't helping me. I can't be here'." Moments later, despite her pleas, he was over the wall and gone. The Maltese police's investigation into his whereabouts is still ongoing and one of the officers involved has described it as one of the force's most "mysterious" cases. "I think he's confused," said Phyllis. "He worked with a lot of Bulgarian people at a warehouse in Luton and got on well with them. There's a big community of them here and I think he might be with them."

The couple had been together for 26 years and married for the past 10. They came to Malta for the first time on honeymoon in 2000 and retired there 18 months ago. Phyllis said there were no marital difficulties and that, while Tom was under stress at the time of his disappearance, he was not suicidal. "We've put up posters in lots of places. I've been on the television and in the newspapers and set up a Facebook page," she said. "I've spoken to walking groups and asked that they keep an eye out for him. I'm offering a reward of 1,000 euros to anyone who can find him."

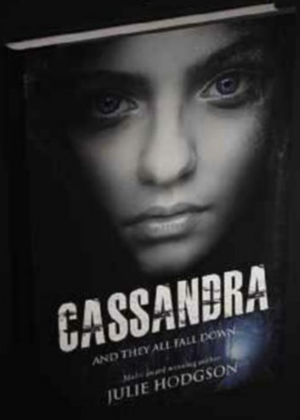
> *"It's really unusual for people to vanish without a trace"*

When people take their own lives in Malta, their bodies are usually discovered, not least because there are few deserted areas on the island, which is less than 17 miles (27km) long and only nine miles (14km) wide, with a population of 420,000 – although those numbers swell considerably during the tourist season. The two other islands in the Maltese archipelago, Gozo and Comino, are even smaller, and the bodies of those who drown are usually returned to shore by the sea.

There were two possible sightings of Tom in the first few days after his disappearance. One of the couple's neighbours says he spoke to Tom at a bus stop and a member of the public claims he spotted him in a supermarket. But there has been nothing since then. *BBC News, 23 May 2017.*

- Svitlana Krasnoselska, originally from Ukraine, was last seen near her home in the village of Micklefield, near Leeds, at 5am on 3 April. She has lived in the UK for 12 years, and is married with a grown-up daughter. West Yorkshire Police said her bank accounts had not been touched and it was completely out of character for the 40-year-old mother to go missing. Specialist search teams with dogs and mountain rescue officers searched a quarter-mile radius around her home – including in a landfill site, disused quarry and cave systems – but found no useful leads. "It's really unusual for people to vanish without a trace," said Det Supt Lisa Atkinson, five weeks after the disappearance. *BBC News, 8 May 2017.*

IN *CASSANDRA: AND THEY ALL FALL DOWN* by Julie Hodgson, Cassandra Jones has violently beaten Braydon Taylor, a six-year-old. But that was 10 years ago. Now Dr. Sommer has taken her off her meds. As a 16-year-old, Cass enjoys hanging out at iCandy, an ice cream joint, with her best friends, Bindi and Leo. She attends Garden City High and loves learning Shakespearean plays from the handsome Mr. Mac. She's also in love with the town's newest resident: Braydon Taylor. But when she's alone, Cass battles incessant hand itching and hallucinations of creepy tentacles wiggling out of her skin. A compulsive need to run to remote locales places her at the center of an epidemic of dead teenagers being found at Jenson's Park. Will her alibi clear her of any wrongdoing or is there a serial killer loose in Garden City?



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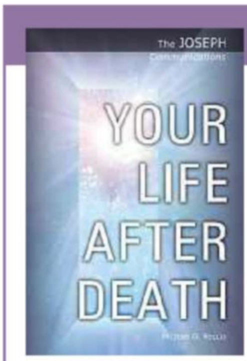

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ARCHÆOLOGY A MONTHLY EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

PAUL SIEVEKING unearths the world's oldest personal ornaments and some very early dental work

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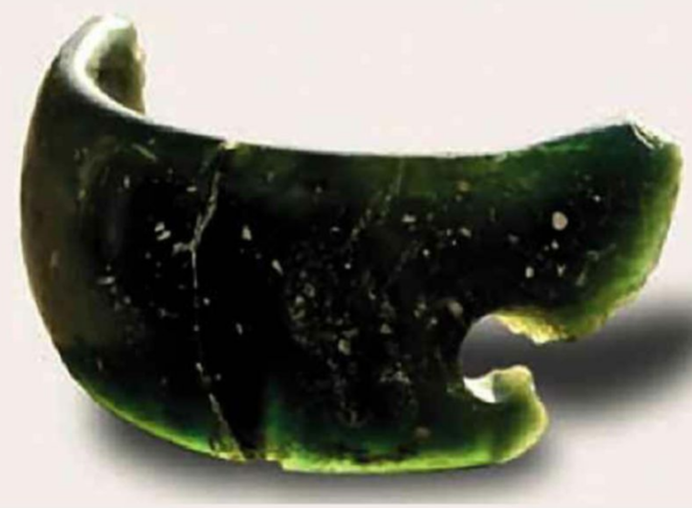


ANATOLY DEREVYANKO

ABOVE LEFT: The 46,000-year-old nose bone found in Kimberley. **ABOVE RIGHT**: The "stunning" 40,000-year-old Denisova cave bracelet.

OLDEST JEWELLERY

A piece of bone jewellery more than 46,000 years old has been discovered in a rock shelter in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Microscopic analysis revealed that the pointed kangaroo leg bone bears traces of red ochre on its ends and scrape marks made by stone tools. The ornament was probably worn through the nasal septum. "I've met Indigenous Australians who remember their granddads wearing nose bones for special occasions," said Michelle Langley of Australian National University. Before the nose bone was found, the oldest bone tools and ornaments in Australia were thought to be only about 20,000 years old. *archaeology.org, 18 Nov 2016.*

Almost as old as the nose bone is a remarkable bracelet from the Denisova cave in Siberia; seven years of analysis have concluded that it was made around 40,000 years ago. It was found next to the bones of extinct animals, such as the woolly mammoth, and other artefacts dating back 125,000 years. The cave is named after the Denisovan people — a mysterious species of hominins from the Homo genus, genetically different from both *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals. They were unique in many ways, having branched away from other humanoid species about a million years ago [**FT353:16**].

The skill involved in making the bracelet shows a level of technique at least 30,000 years ahead of its time; until now, it was believed that such skills had only evolved in about 10,000 BC. Writing in the Russian magazine *Science First Hand*, Dr Anatoly Derevyanko, head of the Museum of History and Culture of the Peoples of Siberia and the Far East in the city of Novosibirsk, stated that when the archæologists studied the diameter variations of the bracelet, they found that the rotational speed of the drill must have been quite high, with minimal fluctuations. "The ancient master," he said, "was skilled in techniques previously considered not characteristic for the Palæolithic era, such as easel speed drilling, boring tool type rasp, grinding and polishing with a leather and skins of varying degrees of tanning."

Probably held in place by a leather strap, the bracelet itself was made from a type of stone called chlorite, which could only have been imported from some 200km (125 miles) away. The bracelet was very delicate and was probably worn at special occasions by some important person, such as a Denisovan princess. "The bracelet is stunning," said Dr Derevyanko. "In bright sunlight it reflects the sun's rays, at night by the fire it casts a deep shade of green." *digitaljournal.com, 8 May 2017.*

EARLIEST DENTAL FILLINGS

A pair of 13,000-year-old front teeth contain the earliest known use of fillings. The teeth, two upper central incisors belonging to one adult, were discovered recently at the Riparo Fredian site near Lucca in northern Italy. Each tooth has a large hole in the incisor's surface that extends down into the pulp chamber deep in the tooth. Archæologists at the University of Bologna found a series of tiny horizontal marks on the inside of the cavities that suggest they had been drilled out and enlarged, probably by microliths (tiny stone tools). The markings were similar to those found in teeth from a site in the Italian Dolomites in 1988 dated to 14,000 year ago, believed to be the first known example of dentistry in humans.

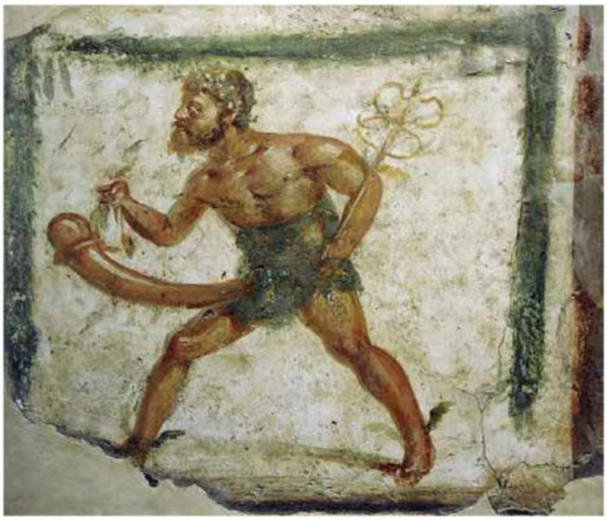
However, these new teeth also have a new dental innovation. The holes contain traces of bitumen, with plant fibres and hairs embedded in it, which are seen as evidence of prehistoric fillings. While the purpose of the plants and hairs is unknown, it appears that they were added to the cavity at the same time as the drilling, so are not simply the remains of food eaten later. The Palæolithic dentist would have drilled out the cavities and filled the holes with bitumen to reduce pain and to keep food out of the pulp chamber, just as in modern dentistry.

The bitumen, along with some medicinal plants, might have been used as an antiseptic, much as beeswax was used in other examples of prehistoric dentistry thousands of years later. These Italian teeth show that humans had developed therapeutic dental practices millennia before we developed the systematic production of foods such as cereals and honey, which are thought to have been responsible for a dramatic increase in dental decay. *D.Mail, 16 July; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 17 July 2015; newscientist.com, 17 April 2017.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

215: COCK A DOODLE DO



Essential literary foreplay: Thomas Hickman, *God's Doodle: The Life and Times of the Penis* (2013) and Kingsley Amis's *Jake's Thing* (1978).

'Doodle' was a regular term for 'cock' in such Victorian erotica as *My Secret Life* (author still a mystery) and *The Pearl* (short-lived porno magazine, of equally obscure parentage).

Common website quotation: "To have a penis is to be chained to a madman." A sentiment answered in verse by (again) Amis, a notorious cocksman in his prime, apparently paraphrased from Sophocles (noted pæderast) as reported in Plato, *Republic*, bk1 para329.

When Madame de Gaulle (see various websites) was asked by a British reporter what she most looked forward to in the General's retirement, she innocently replied "A penis" – it was gently pointed out to her that the word was pronounced 'Happiness'.

In these days of 'Size Does Matter' and your in-boxes crammed with promises of immediate organic extension – are we all in a state of penile servitude? – it's a pleasant surprise to find that gods and heroes in classical art (and, later, Michelangelo's David) are very modestly endowed.

This was eagerly seized upon by Ernest Hemingway (himself miniscule) as a consolation for himself and equally under-hung F Scott Fitzgerald; no doubt also by Montgomery Cliff, dubbed by film-maker Kenneth Anger 'Princess Tiny Meat'.

Haven't checked with Mat Coward, but it seems the claim that John Dillinger's 19-incher is somewhere in the Smithsonian Museum is an urban legend; so probably the cognate yarn that J Edgar Hoover kept it preserved in a jar on his desk.

No surprise that porno stars' appendages weigh in amongst the giants, for example Arthur Mead and John Holmes ('Johnny Wad'), respectively 14in (35.5cm) and 13in (33cm). Ex-wife Ava Gardener said of Frank Sinatra – otherwise a little prick – that "Frank only weighed 120 pounds [54kg] but 110 of those were cock."

Big doodles were regarded as ugly and shameful, fit for Satyrs and comedy, from Aristophanes who laughs at giant fake ones – a phallusy? – with red tips designed to amuse the children – intriguing bit of evidence for kids at the Athenian theatre and their sexual sophistication – to Herodas describing (in his *Mimes*) women jostling to buy the latest dildos (nowadays, vibrators, one supposes) from Miletus, their place of invention, to the once-infamous paintings and statues at Pompeii – there's a story that Prince Philip once shielded the royal missus from catching a glimpse…

The one god equipped with a giant organ was Priapus, essentially a Worzel Gummidge with attitude (see the scurrilous Latin Priapeia poems), associated with Lampsacus in Thrace (roughly modern Bulgaria).

Men liked to joke about women gratifying themselves on his capacious wooden willy. He is a central figure in (e.g.) Horace (*Satires* 1. 8) and Petronius's *Satyricon*, plus modern literary Nachleben in for instance TS Eliot ("Priapus in the Shrubbery") and Nabokov's *Lolita* and *Invitation to a Beheading*.

This deity old man was, though, equalled, indeed surpassed, by – if you believe Ctesias in *Photius's Library*, ch72 para46b – the central Indian tribe whose men "had members long enough to reach the ground, and thick."

Egyptian twist: Merneptah, once (wrongly) thought the Pharoah of the Exodus, cut off the penises of all uncircumcised males after a battle, making it piquant that tip and scrotum were found missing from his mummy.

Greek and Roman men were not circumcised, clearly deeming it the unkindest cut of all. Mercifully, no sign of female genital mutilation. Romans had a special word (verpa) for trimmed males, usually uncomplimentary, as were their references to the foreskin-less Jews.

Catullus (58. 5) describes his ex-girlfriend Clodia peeling back (special verb, glubit) the prepuces of casual pick-ups before fellating them. On this whole business, see Frederick M Hodges, 'The Ideal Prepuce in Ancient Greece and Rome,' *The Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 78 (2001), 375-405.

Juvenal (*Satires* 1. 41) moans that (in Peter Green's Penguin translation): "Each lover will get his cut depending on the size of his – services rendered." Given his excoriations of both homosexual and female lust (*Satires* 2, 6, 9), perhaps a trans-gender aphorism. Emperor Commodus fits this bill, a devoted sister-shagger, possessor of a vast harem of women, equally devoted to a man nicknamed 'Donkey' because his "male member was larger than that of most animals" (*Historia Augusta*, ch10 para9).

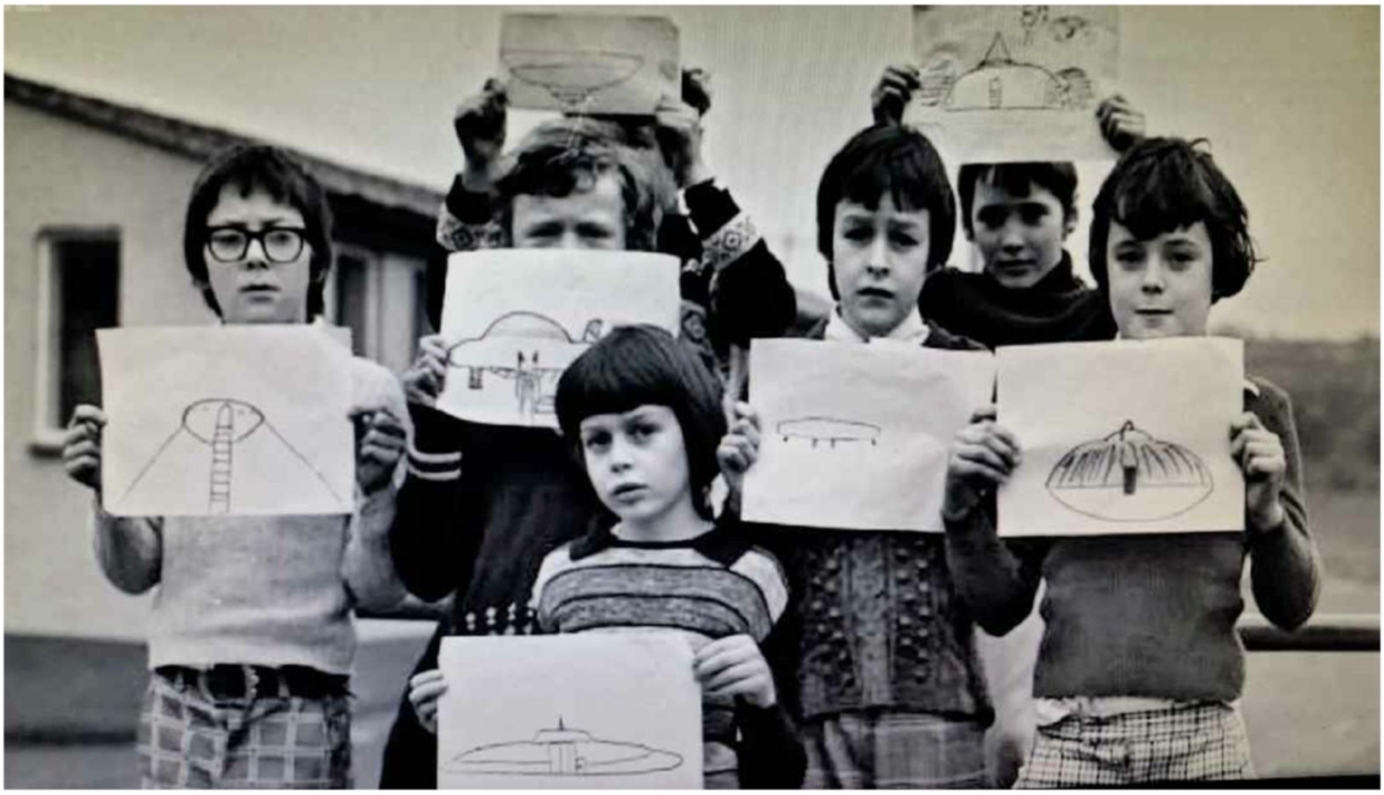
Juvenal (6. 374-5, 9. 32-6) and Martial (*Epigrams*, 1.97, 2. 51, 9. 34) both ridicule 'size queens' (their British counterparts apotheosised in the novel *Queens* by 'Pickles', 1984) slavering over inordinately hung men in the public baths. Top (or bottom) of this particular form was teenaged emperor Elagabalus who (*HA* 5. 2) had scouts search throughout Rome for similar types "that he might enjoy their vigour".

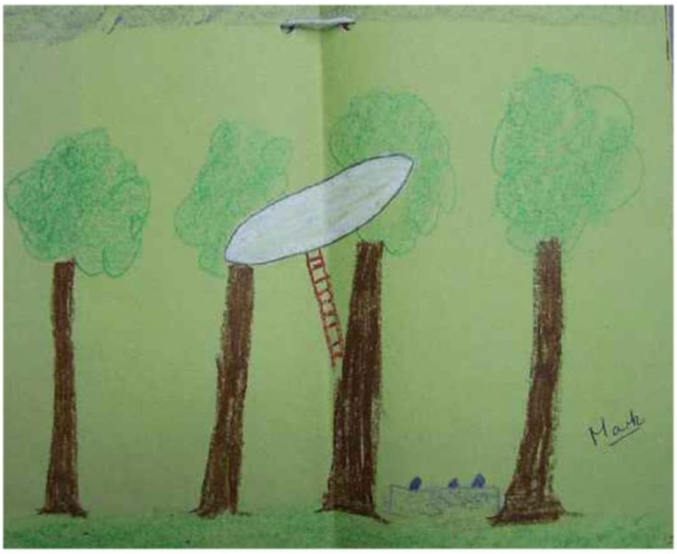
"Every time the emperor Heraclius urinated, he had to lay a board across his stomach to avoid spurting in his face" (Nicephorus, *Histories*, bk7 ch11). Such penile curvature is medically known as Peyronie's Disease, another victim of which is Bill Clinton – did his bendy bit cause Monica any technical problems...?

As we'd say in the North of England, 'tis nowt but a cock-stride' from this to a perhaps more elevated topic in the next CC...

BRITAIN'S X-FILES 2017

DAVID CLARKE sifts through the latest batch of UFO files released by the National Archive





ABOVE: Children from Broad Haven primary school hold up drawings of what they saw in February 1977. **LEFT:** A drawing by one of the young Macclesfield witnesses.

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A collection of miscellaneous UFO files were opened at Britain's National Archives in June. DAVID CLARKE picks out the highlights from a mixed bag of fortean oddness.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE PLAYGROUND KIND

“We were playing at netball in the yard with Mrs Williams and she was showing us how to throw the ball into the net when I saw an object high in the sky.” In immaculate handwriting, ten-year-old Gwawr Jones reported her UFO experience in a letter addressed to the Commanding Officer at RAF Valley in North Wales.

The letter, endorsed by her teacher, arrived with a collection of drawings showing an identical flying saucer, produced by her school pals. “I shouted at the others and they looked up and saw it,” her account continued. “It had a black dome on top and a silver cigar-shaped base. It was travelling smoothly across the sky in a northerly direction. It remained in our sight for about three minutes. Then it went behind the only cloud in the sky and reappeared again for about one minute, then disappeared.”

Gwawr was one of nine youngsters, aged eight to 11, who saw the silent object from Rhosybol School in Anglesey, North Wales, on the afternoon of Wednesday, 16 February 1977. Their teacher, Mair Williams, told the *Western Mail*: “It was a really bright afternoon and the object was flying very high towards Bull Bay… I took the children back into school, separated them and then told them to draw what they had seen. It was really astonishing – their drawings were all similar. I never believed in these things until I saw this!”

Their extraordinary story was one of dozens that reached the Ministry of Defence's UFO desk, S4 (Air) in 1977.[1] A covering note, from RAF Valley, adds “[we] can offer no positive explanation or identification.”

Viewed in isolation, this story would appear much like the other 435 sightings logged by the British government half a century ago. But with the benefit of hindsight it is just one of a previously unnoticed cluster of eerily similar experiences reported by small groups of unrelated schoolchildren, in the space of six months.

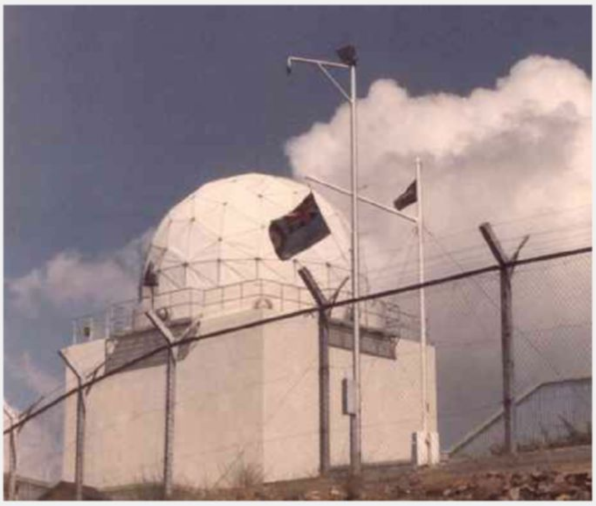
What on Earth, or off it, was going on? Earlier on the same day, 16 February, a report reached MoD from David Hunt, science master at Penlee secondary school in Plymouth. Here four boys and one adult independently reported seeing “a cigar-shaped UFO above the school playground” that flew horizontally before it climbed into cloud and disappeared.[2] Then, one lunchtime in October, 1977, 10 Cheshire children, aged seven to 11, saw an elliptical UFO hovering in trees beside the playground of Upton Primary School in Macclesfield, before it rose into the sky and vanished. Their teacher, Mrs Hindmarsh, reacted in much the same way as her colleague in Anglesey. She ushered the children inside and asked them to draw what they had seen, separating them to ensure that no copying took place. The youngsters used pencils and coloured crayons to produce the images that ended up in a MoD file that remained closed until 2006.[3] Their drawings are so clear and striking that I selected them as one of the highlights in my new book on UFO art from the National Archives, to be published in October.[4]

In this case, their teacher passed the dossier of artwork to Cheshire Police and Air Traffic Control at Preston and the MoD's UFO desk. In his covering letter the police officer said there was "a remarkable similarity in these sketches with regard to the UFO and its location between two trees".

What sparked off this mini-flap? What inspired youngsters of a similar age, from across the UK, to look into the sky and see unidentified flying objects moving above their schools and playgrounds? The arrival of *Close Encounters of the Third*, and the media hype that accompanied its release, was a whole year away. George Lucas's original *Star Wars* movie opened in UK cinemas in December 1977, some months after this mini-flap. I was 10 years old in 1977 and my introduction to ufology came not from movies but from the TV screen. In May, BBC1 ran the Hugh Burnett documentary *Out of this World* in a prime-time slot that was my first exposure to flying sorcery. Burnett's programme included interviews with UFO witnesses and contactees, plus classic footage from around the world. Elsewhere on TV, the year opened with the fourth incarnation of *Doctor Who*, Tom Baker, grappling with the Robots of Death on a distant planet.

But I suspect a more immediate inspiration for the spate of playground UFO sightings came from the childrens' peers – via mass media reports from the so-called West Wales flap or 'Welsh Triangle' as it was dubbed by the tabloids (see **FT200:24-25**). Early in February groups of children

A COLD WAR CLOSE ENCOUNTER



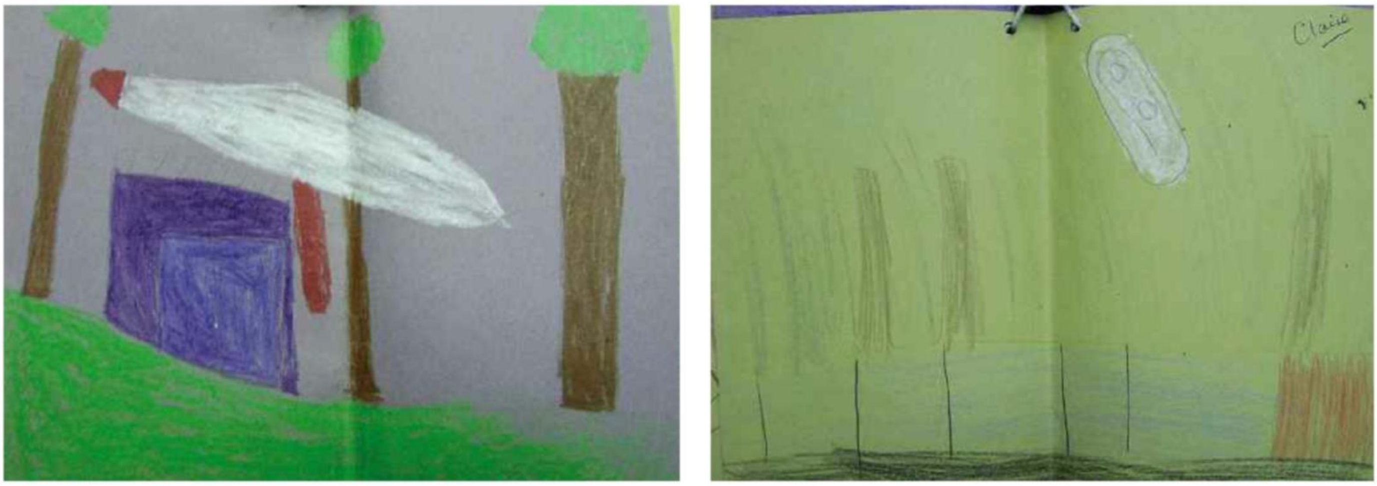
A previously unknown Cold War close encounter witnessed by the crew of a US Air Force spy-plane has been revealed in files released by Britain's National Archives. In June, a small group of RAF files were opened that had not been part of the UFO file release programme that ended in 2013 (see **FT304:28-9**). They include an account of an incident on 19 October 1982 when a USAF RC-135 plane, monitoring Soviet military activity, was buzzed by "a big object" over the eastern Mediterranean. British personnel at RAF Troodos (pictured at right) on Cyprus listened to the radio calls of the American crew as the encounter unfolded at 35,000ft (10,700m)above the sea.

The UFO – described as covered in "a multitude of flashing lights, 20 at a time" – was picked up on the spy-plane's radar as it approached from the south. It circled around the plane, call-sign Beano 73, and closed in. Two US Navy F-14 fighters were scrambled from an aircraft carrier and a RAF Phantom was diverted from a night flying exercise to intercept the UFO, south of the island. As the three interceptors approached the USAF crew saw the UFO depart towards the African coast. Nothing was seen by the fighter pilots.

The files reveal how personnel at the radar station high on Mount Olympus monitored the incident for a period of 90 minutes. But nothing was seen by British air defence stations – "nor was it seen on any ground or seaborne radar, including at 280 SU [280 Signals Unit – RAF Troodos]". A signal reporting the sighting sent from RAF Troodos to MoD UK on 20 October describes the UFO as "larger than [a] RC-135". Boeing RC-135 aircraft are used by the USAF and RAF to support intelligence gathering. They have been used in every armed conflict including Cold War operations around the borders of the former Soviet Union. The aircraft are 136ft (41m) in length with a wingspan of 130ft (nearly 40m). The signal refers to the 'object' first spotted: "…initially about two miles from wing of RC-135… moved position around aircraft and closed… object tailed Beano 73 for 90 mins on its northeast/southwest race track…" The message says the UFO was seen by the "whole crew".

Following the encounter, a secret investigation was launched by the British authorities. The results were sent to the US Department of Defense in November 1982. Officially the US Air Force's UFO Project, Blue Book, was closed in 1969. The British Ministry of Defence closed its own UFO desk in 2009 and its secret space intelligence unit, DI55, said it was no longer interested in 'unidentified aerial phenomena' (UAP) in 2000. But the newly-released RAF file reveals that officials ordered a transcript to be made of the tape recording that captured radio transmissions made between the spy-plane crew and ground controllers. Film provided by the RAF Troodos radar station was scrutinised by intelligence officers in London. The file does not reveal what happened to this evidence. The results of the joint UK/US investigation do not appear in the file, but a tentative explanation is offered by a senior RAF official, who wrote: "We have a strong suspicion that the 'UFO' was a mirage effect from lights on the coast of Israel or Lebanon".

Elsewhere in the files, there is a collection of UFO statistics compiled by a Group Captain based at the RAF's HQ No 11 Group at Bentley Priory. He collated information on UFO reports received by RAF radar stations for a 30-year period ending in 1996, in response to a Parliamentary Question from the Labour MP for Don Valley, Martin Redmond. The bases who responded to his request included the Ballistic Missile Early Warning Station at RAF Fylingdales on the North York Moors. Although most stations had received calls from members of the public and occasionally police officers reporting sightings, none had ever been corroborated by RAF itself. His report to the MoD says he could find "no reports or mention… of UFOs detected by ADGE [Air Defence Ground Environment] units or 11/18 Group aircraft using radar equipment".



ALL IMAGES: CROWN COPYRIGHT

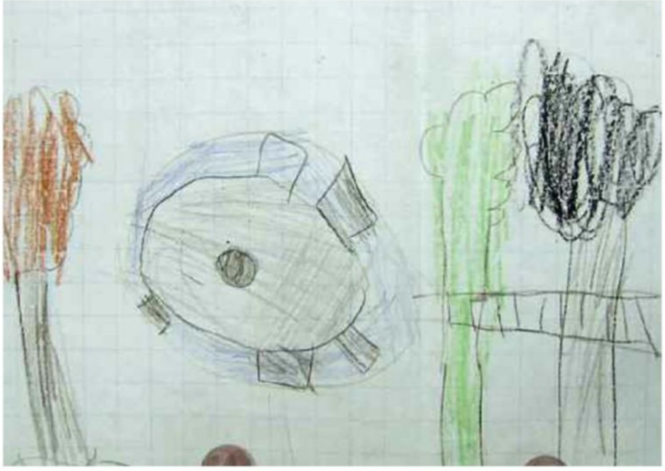
ABOVE AND BELOW: Drawings by children from Upton Primary School, Macclesfield. **BOTTOM:** A letter to the childrens' teacher from the Ministry of Defence.

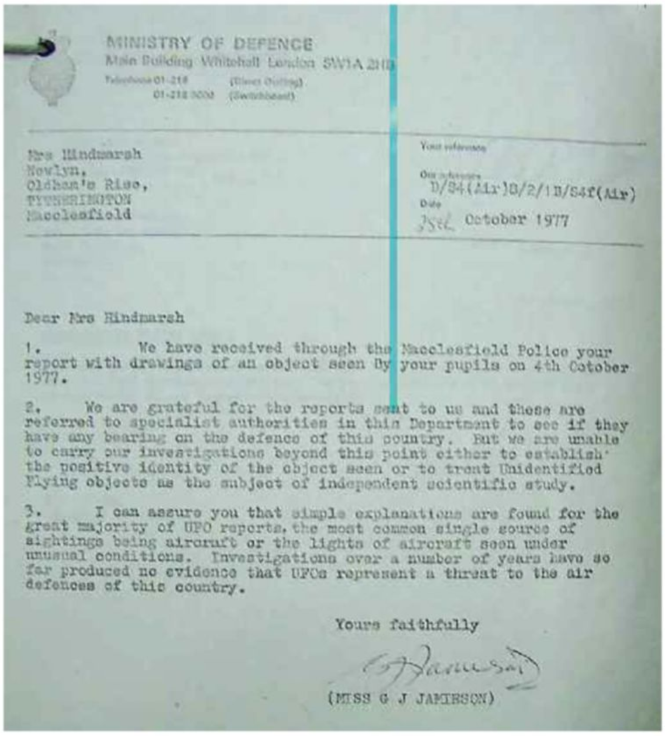
at three Welsh primary schools reported UFO sightings, but only the story from Broad Haven primary school was widely covered by the media, with the youngsters interviewed live on national television at the scene. In this case a group of 15 children, mainly 10-year-old boys, saw a shiny cigar-shaped UFO on the ground – not in the sky – in fields behind their school during their lunch break on Friday, 4 February 1977.

It was raining at the time and the boys were playing football when someone pointed out the object, partially hidden by trees and shrubs. Two of the group said the elongated object had a silver dome with a flashing light on the top. Six of the group said they saw a tall man dressed in a silver space-suit standing beside the UFO. Evidently scared, the children ran back to the school but were not initially believed by the adults. After school finished, groups of youngsters went UFO spotting and later, supported by their parents, they visited the local police station. [5]

Drawings made by the children were sent to the MoD and the originals are today preserved in a scrapbook at the school. This archive includes a contemporary account from the school diary, written in the third person by head-teacher Ralph Llewellyn, who became the focus of a media scrum. It reveals that he interviewed 15 children separately on Monday, 7 February, and examined their drawings and notes. The drawings are often described as "remarkably similar" but although made independently they were not produced until three days after the sighting, so the children had the entire weekend to discuss what they had seen.

Nevertheless, Mr Llewellyn concluded they were telling the truth: "After allowing for variations and embellishments [the head-teacher] is loath to believe that the children are capable of a sustained sophisticated hoax; that they did see something they hadn't seen before he is prepared to accept. He himself, while seeking a natural explanation of the incident, is prepared to keep an open mind on the subject". [6]





MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
Main Building Whitehall London SW1A 2HB
Telephone 01-218 (Direct Dialling)
01-218 9000 (Switchboard)

Mrs Hindmarsh
Newlyn,
Oldham's Rise,
TYTHERINGTON
Macclesfield

Your reference

Our reference
D/S4(Air)B/2/1B/S4f(Air)
Date
31st October 1977

Dear Mrs Hindmarsh

1. We have received through the Macclesfield Police your report with drawings of an object seen by your pupils on 4th October 1977.

2. We are grateful for the reports sent to us and these are referred to specialist authorities in this Department to see if they have any bearing on the defence of this country. But we are unable to carry our investigations beyond this point either to establish the positive identity of the object seen or to treat Unidentified Flying objects as the subject of independent scientific study.

3. I can assure you that simple explanations are found for the great majority of UFO reports, the most common single source of sightings being aircraft or the lights of aircraft seen under unusual conditions. Investigations over a number of years have so far produced no evidence that UFOs represent a threat to the air defences of this country.

Yours faithfully

(MISS G J JAMIESON)

NOTES

1 TNA DEFE 24/2879/1

2 TNA DEFE 71/34

3 TNA DEFE 24/1206

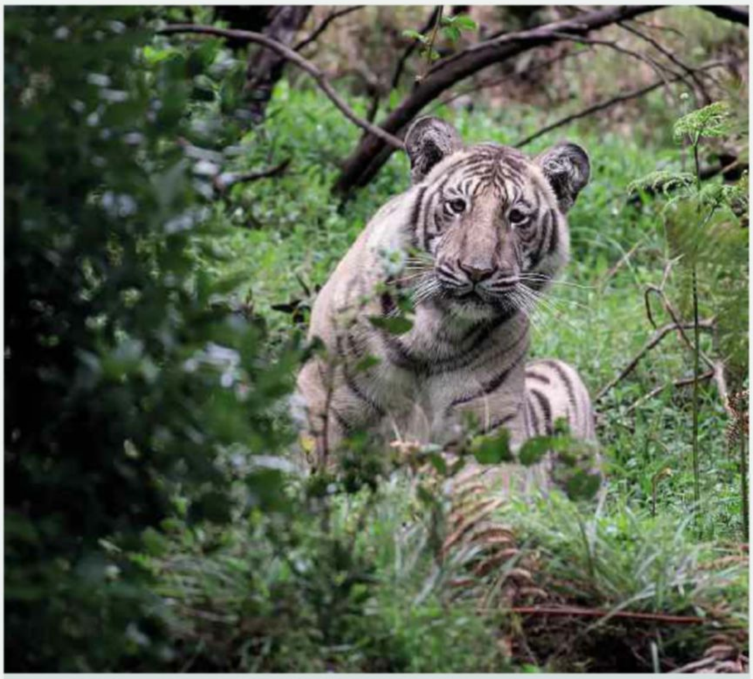
4 David Clarke, *UFO Drawings at The National Archives*, Four Corners books, 2017.

5 BBC News SW Wales, 4 February 2017: "Broad Haven UFO sightings marked 40 years on". An on-site investigation by the late Hilary Evans, published in *The Unexplained* part-work in 1982, found the most likely explanation was the children had seen and misperceived a vehicle associated with the local sewage plant nearby.

6 Thanks to Neil Spring, author of the 2015 novel *The Watchers*, which is based upon the West Wales UFO flap of 1977, for images from the school diary.

ALIEN ZOO NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF CRYPTOZOOLOGY

KARL SHUKER admires a white tiger photo and asks what lies beneath an Alaskan lake



NILANJAN RAY

TIGER, TIGER, TURNING WHITE

White tigers, all known specimens of which belong to the Bengal tiger subspecies, owe their characteristically pallid pelage (a condition called leucism, genetically distinct from albinism) to a single amino acid change, A477V, in a particular transporter protein known as SLC45A2 (which mediates pigment production). This change inhibits the synthesis of red and yellow pigment (phæomelanin), but not black (eumelanin), thereby explaining why white tigers still possess dark stripes. Although never common, white tigers did occur naturally in the wild state for centuries (as confirmed by early artistic representations and hunting records), but their spectacular appearance marked them out as sought-after hunting trophies, and the strain was eventually wiped out.

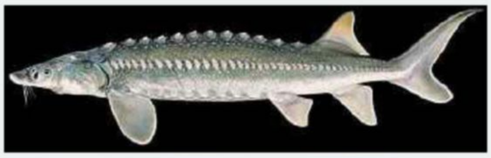
The last known wild specimen, a magnificent male named Mohan, was captured alive on 27 May 1951, and was housed thereafter in the now-disused summer palace of the Maharajah of Rewa. Mohan was bred with normal tigers, thereby preserving and passing on the mutant recessive gene allele responsible for the above amino acid change causing leucism, and it is therefore from Mohan that many of the white tigers existing in captivity today ultimately descend (a few have arisen independently, due to spontaneous mutations, or to normal tigers carrying the recessive gene allele mating with one another and thereby engendering the white phenotype, i.e. outward appearance, in offspring carrying two copies of this mutant allele).

So it came as a huge surprise to zoologists lately when a white tiger was not only reported but also conclusively photographed in the wild, by wildlife photographer Nilanjan Ray while on a road trip through a reserve forest with a guide during a recent visit to the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, situated in southern India's Nilgiri Hills and Western Ghats. To ensure the white tiger's safety, the precise location of Ray's sighting has not been made public, but camera traps are to be sited there in the hope of recording further sightings of this remarkable animal, whose existence demonstrates that, against all the odds, the mutant leucism allele does still survive within the wild tiger population. NB – many online reports of this incident (but not the report cited here) are extremely muddled, conflating leucism with albinism, so those should be read with caution. *www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/white-tiger-in-the-nilgiris-is-a-first/article19217223.ece 5 July 2017.*

MONSTROUS SIGHTINGS IN ALASKA

Sightings of enormous unidentified fish-like creatures have long been reported from an immense body of freshwater in southwestern Alaska known as Lake Iliamna – covering around 1000 sq miles (2,590km^2), approximately 77 miles (124km) long, and with a maximum recorded depth of 988ft (300m), it is the third largest lake entirely within the USA. Scientists speculate that if they do indeed exist, these mystery beasts may constitute a population of white sturgeon *Acipenser transmontanus* (pictured below), but if the accounts are accurate they are exceptionally large even for this notably sizeable fish, known to attain lengths of up to 20ft (6m). Moreover, they would also represent the world's most northerly population of this species.

Another suggested identity is the Pacific sleeper shark *Somniosus pacificus*, comparable in size to the white sturgeon. In recent years, reports of Lake Iliamna's monstrous inhabitants have been sparse, but on 19 June 2017 and for the next few days, several independent sightings were made of between one and three mysterious aquatic beasts seen offshore near the lakeside town of Kakhonak and claimed to be the size of large whales. At least six adults and several children saw them, and two of the adults were observing them through binoculars. All were in agreement as to what they saw. According to one of these eyewitnesses, Kakhonak resident Gary Nielson: "There was more than one, at least three. The first was the biggest; maybe double the size of a 32-foot [10m] gillnetter. The animal either blew like a whale, or spit water from his mouth or something. The smaller animals behind him did the same but not as dramatic. They were black or very dark grey. They surfaced like whales for maybe two to three seconds about a mile offshore. I am at a total loss as to what they could be". Needless to say, if these cryptids were indeed spouting water, they are more likely to have been cetaceans than either sturgeons or sharks; also, a 64ft (19.5m) fish of any kind would be a monster in every sense of the word. *www.adn.com/outdoors-adventure/2017/06/28/lake-illiamna-monster-lore-resurfaces-with-new-sightings/ 28 June 2017.*



J CHING / UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

PELTING PRESECUTION

A poltergeist that throws hot stones is making life a misery for a Bulawayo family

PHOTOS: MANICA POST

ABOVE: Farai Mashiri with a pot that was damaged beyond repair in one of the episodes. **BELOW**: Women and children of the Manjengwa family sit outside their home. **OPPOSITE PAGE**: Another family member, Sekuru Manjengwa, holds up one of the stones thrown by the invisible assailant.

Lydia Manjengwa, a widow with eight children, has been forced from her house near Bulawayo in Zimbabwe and made homeless after being pelted by large "hot stones" thrown by invisible assailants. The location of this apparent pelting poltergeist persecution is Manjengwa Village in Buhera district. A journalist from *The Manica Post* visited the family at 1:30pm on 27 June. Moments later Future Mashiri (35) and her brother's wife Tafadzwa Matevera (19) – both with babies strapped on their backs – emerged from adjacent rock outcrops where they had rushed for cover from the raining stones. The yard was strewn with water buckets, plates, pots, and other household utensils damaged beyond repair and use. Kitchen shelves had been broken and roofs shattered. Fresh and healed scars of burns were visible on most of the family members. The stones were too big for a person to throw around with such frequency without being detected. The fusillade only ceased when strangers visited. The stones were allegedly passing through walls without leaving holes on the outside or burning the grass thatched roof.

The kitchen shelves had been shattered and roofs scattered

"We had to run away because we were being pelted with the hot stones," said Future Mashiri. "This place is not habitable. We have become the laughing stock of the whole village and nobody is prepared to give us refuge and food. It started on 9 May. The stones follow us everywhere we go and we are being asked to leave people's homes as we continued to be pelted with the hot stones. We have sought solutions from seven prophets and a traditional healer, but it was all in vain because the attack has not ceased. We cannot hide as the invisible attacker is always in hot pursuit. We are all injured and our household property was damaged. We do not sleep at all; we spend nights in mountains, with these little babies. It's so tough and painful to spend cold evenings in the open. All we need is a rest and lasting solution to this problem. Our mother [Lydia Manjengwa] has gone to Makumbe Mission to look for one prophet we were referred to."

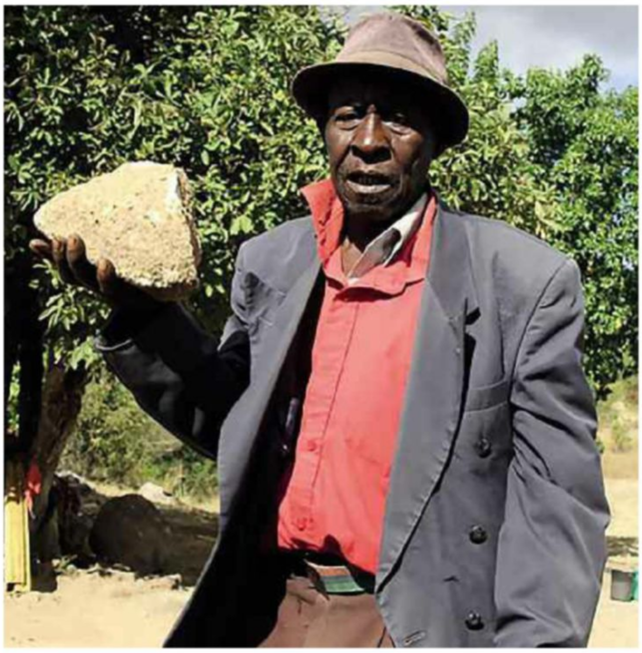
Lydia rejoined her native Manjengwa family in 1996 following a quarrel with Madhimbe Mutondondo Mashiri, who later died in 2001. The Manjengwas, who are the village heads, gave her a portion of land to live on. The family is now divided over the strange occurrences, amid suspicion that a kinsman possesses goblins. This suspicion was backed up by one Madzibaba Washy in his 'prophetic utterances'.

Mr Tedious Manjengwa (70), Lydia's constant companion, said it was embarrassing that the family was not working together. "This is our home and she is our sister, and as the Manjengwas we superintend this homestead and family. What is happening here is troubling me; it is giving me sleepless nights. I am looking for someone who can use whatever powers to unpack the whole mystery, and if possible, send these mysterious hot stones back to the sender. I want the person responsible for these terrible things to be named and shamed. I suspect someone in this family is up to no good. This is an issue we should be putting our heads together as a family, but it is only myself and Lydia showing concern."

Viola Kobe, wife of Tedious Manjengwa, repeated an account by one of the prophets. "The spirit of an identified family member [name supplied] spoke through aunt Lydia," she said. "It first identified itself, and admitted to being responsible for throwing the stones, arguing that it wanted a human head to sacrifice and enhance a *kombi* business. The prophet told this family that the solution was from within. The prophet left in a huff because the family went on to hire other prophets before exhausting what he had instructed."

A relative, Mr Jealous Mapingire, said at first he doubted the Manjengwas' account until three stones were thrown at them. "I saw one huge stone being thrown at Moses Masunga's homestead where they had sought refuge," he said. "When I touched it, it was hot like it was coming from a blast furnace. I gathered the stones with a view to burn them because they are evil. I still have the stones at my house because I still want to destroy them. Imagine if such stones could hit a child, the child would die. The family has been ostracised, nobody wants to entertain them for fear of being pelted. I wonder what kind of magic, because the stones were so heavy and you would not expect such stones to rise on their own." *Bulawayo 24 News, 1 July 2017.*

From time to time, *Fortean Times* has carried very similar accounts of paranormal stone pelting, most often in Africa. There was a particularly detailed report of a case in Machakos, Kenya, in 1982, with photographs [**FT44:36-40**]. Subsequent cases were reported from South Africa in 2004 [**FT189:10**] and Halesowen, West Midlands, in 2006 [**FT215:12**].



MANICA POST

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

215: GUIDE DOGS

The myth

When the blind human and the seeing dog reach a road crossing, the dog stops, and waits. When the dog is sure that it's safe to cross, it gives a tug on the lead to let the human know that it's time to go.

The "truth"

According to guide dog charities and organisations for the visually impaired, this is one of the most widespread misunderstandings concerning seeing-eye animals. I suppose it's fairly obvious when you think about it, but I confess I never had thought about it: it's not the guide dog who tells the human it's safe to cross – it's the human who tells the guide dog. Canine eyes cannot be trained to read traffic lights, for one thing. The human uses hearing (of traffic, other pedestrians, or crossing signals) to judge when it's safe to cross, and tells the dog to walk on. However, guide dogs are trained in the art of "selective disobedience" or "intelligent disobedience", and will refuse to obey an order if they can see that it would be dangerous to do so. Nor do the guide dogs lead their handlers on journeys; they are led by the handler's signals. So what are the dogs for? Chiefly, to guide their humans around obstacles (such as street furniture, and low overhangs), and to stop at certain places where a decision is needed, such as road crossings, stairs and lifts.

Sources

www.guidedogs.org.uk/microsites/sponsor-a-puppy/blogs/2015/may/the-myths-and-facts-around-guide-dogs; www.dogster.com/lifestyle/guide-dogs-for-the-blind-misconceptions; www.tricitynews.com/news/ten-myths-about-guide-dogs-1.433167; http://www.kidzworld.com/article/1117-how-guide-dogs-work

Disclaimer

If you are a guide-dog user – or indeed a guide dog – please do let us know which bits we've got wrong.

Mythchaser

A reader who is also a police officer asks about chalk (or tape) outlines of murder victims; he's never seen one, and suspects that these days such contamination of a crime scene would be frowned upon. But, he wants to know, was there ever a time when chalk outlines did exist, or are they pure Hollywood?

MATTERS OF LIFE & DEATH

India's frozen guru, benefits of the living dead and more modern Lazaruses...

SHAMMI MEHRA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Followers of Ashutosh Maharaj (below) offer prayers for the frozen guru at his ashram in Nurmahal.

KEEPING BODIES

On 5 July an Indian court allowed a guru's disciples to preserve his body in a freezer, as they believe he is in samadhi, a deep state of meditation, and will return to life. Ashutosh Maharaj, the founder of Divya Jyoti Jagrati Sansthan (Divine Light Awakening Mission), apparently died of a heart attack in January 2014. Since then, his body has been kept frozen at his heavily guarded 100-acre ashram in the northern state of Punjab. His disciples insist that he had regularly attained samadhi in the sub-zero Himalayan temperatures that descend on Punjab in the winter. The guru was born in Bihar, the poorest state in India. He founded his mission in 1983 to promote self-awakening and global peace. The sect has millions of followers worldwide and is estimated to be worth £92 million. The group has a vast property portfolio, with buildings worth tens of millions of pounds on five continents. The Punjab and Haryana High Court dismissed a three-year-old petition by Dalip Kumar Jha, who claims to be the guru's son and who wishes to thaw the body and cremate it in accordance with Hindu ritual. The court, while rejecting the plea, set aside a 2014 judgement that had ordered his cremation after doctors confirmed him clinically dead. Mr Jha's lawyer said that it was unclear whether the judges had accepted the sect's claims that the guru was still alive, and that the case would be taken to the Supreme Court. Mr Jha alleges the sect has clung to the body to keep control of the group's wealth. Both he and the guru's former driver have called for a criminal investigation into his death. Disciples have responded by saying that Mr Jha wants to stake a claim in the business. *D.Telegraph, 6 July; Times, 7 July 2017.*

● An embalmed couple were to be buried after their son kept them at his Edinburgh home for more than 20 years. Mervyn Marcel wanted to build a refrigerated unit to store Hilda and Eugenois, and later planned to remove their remains to the West Bank in the Middle East. Hilda Marcel died in 1987 aged 68 and Eugenois in 1994, aged 91. Edinburgh council, which has held the bodies in the city morgue since police found them in May 2002, was given permission by Lord Mulholland at the Court of Session to bury them. *Times, Guardian, 4 Feb 2017.*

● A man who hid the body of his dead girlfriend in the airing cupboard of their flat for 15 months while he claimed her benefits has been jailed for four years and four months. Andrew Reade, 43, wrapped the body of Vicky Cherry, 44, in a duvet and plastic sheeting after her death in October 2015 and hid it at their home in Bolton, Greater Manchester, until it was found in a police search last January after her family filed a missing person report. Ms Cherry's cause of death could not be ascertained because

PHOTOS: FACEBOOK

ABOVE LEFT: Vicky Cherry. **ABOVE CENTRE**: Sharon Greenop and daughter Shayla. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Mr Huang: not dead yet. **BELOW**: Jimmy Young feared premature burial.

of advanced decomposition. Neighbours in the quiet cul-de-sac had noticed "a dodgy smell", but believed Reade when he told them Ms Cherry had left him to stay with her mother. *D.Express, 18 Feb; D.Telegraph, South Wales Argus, 6 June 2017.*

- Another cul-de-sac, this one in Scotland, held a similar macabre secret. Sharon Greenop, 46, is believed to have lain dead in her bed for months while her teenage daughter Shayla and her younger sister Lynnette carried on living in the house. Police discovered the body after being called to the terraced property in Troon, Ayrshire, on 10 November 2016. Inside they found a number of creatures, including two tarantulas, rats, a rabbit, a blind cat and a three-legged sheepdog. The family were well known in the town and were often seen out walking the dog, which had lost a front leg in a road accident. *D.Express, 24 Nov 2016.*

For the last round-up of kept corpses, see 'Departure denied', **FT349:20**.

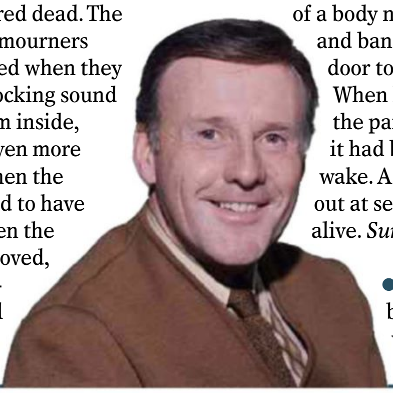
DEADLY ERRORS

- The broadcaster Sir Jimmy Young, who died on 7 November 2016 aged 95, feared being buried alive. In his will, drawn up in 2008, he wrote: "I hereby express the wish that my Trustees will use their best endeavours to ensure that after I have been certified dead and before I am buried my body shall receive a lethal injection." According to the *Sun*, friends confirmed that the celebrated Radio 2 DJ was given the said injection. *D.Telegraph, Sun, D.Mail, 4 April 2017.*

- Msizi Mkhize, 28, was walking home with a friend when he was hit by a car in KwaMashu, a township north of Durban, South Africa. He was declared dead, taken to a mortuary, and placed in a fridge. When his family arrived for identification purposes the next day, he was found to be alive and rushed to hospital – but died five hours later. *Times, 12 Dec 2016.*

- Mr Huang's family gathered round his coffin to pay their final respects more than eight hours after he had been declared dead. The assembled mourners were shocked when they heard a knocking sound coming from inside, and were even more alarmed when the lid appeared to have moved. When the lid was removed, the 75-year-old was still alive and asked: "What's happening? Are you preparing my funeral?" His son Huang Mingquan said his father, who had been battling cancer of the oesophagus, has stopped breathing and had "cold feet and hands". He was said to be recovering from his premature departure, which happened in the district of Yuling in China's western Sichuan province. *Sun, 13 Jan; Times, 14 Jan 2017.*

Police found tarantulas, rats and a three-legged sheepdog



- A Russian was mistakenly declared dead after drinking too much vodka at a party in Khasansky. Waking up in a packed mortuary freezer in the dark, he felt a frozen limb of a body next to him and banged on the door to be let out. When he returned to the party, he found it had become his wake. A friend passed out at seeing him alive. *Sun, 2 Jan 2016.*

- A Chinese baby who was declared dead and spent the night in a morgue began making a noise as he was about to be cremated. He had spent 15 hours in a morgue in Pan'an county, near Jinhua city in the eastern province of Zhejiang at a temperature of 10.4°F (-12°C). The boy had been born two months early on 8 January, weighing just over 3lb (1.4kg), and spent 23 days in an incubator. Doctors were cautious about his chances of recovery. *Times, D.Telegraph, 10 Feb 2016.*

- Four-year-old John-Henry Birtle fell into a hotel pool in Slough, Berkshire, and lay beneath the water for nine minutes. He was dragged out apparently lifeless and given CPR by staff. His pulse did not return for 11 more minutes and it was a further eight minutes before he began to breathe on his own again. His mother Roseann, who pulled him out, said: "He was starved of oxygen for 28 minutes. For those 28 minutes he was gone." Doctors warned the family from Newark, Nottinghamshire, that he would never have a good quality of life; but he was walking and starting to speak again just weeks after the accident. *D.Mirror, 13 May 2017.*

For the last round-up of the "Lazarus phenomenon", see **FT334:10-11**.

FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

Ufology today: all fringe and no middle

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

TARAS YOUNG / CREATIVE COMMONS

I mentioned in the last column "the odder edges of ufology", but suddenly the summer silly season is upon us, and I find myself wondering if ufology isn't all odd edges, inlets, harbours, bays and eddies, with no real mainstream at all. More like a kind of lake – or even swamp. Certain cynics of my acquaintance will of course ask why it took me so long. Let me elucidate.

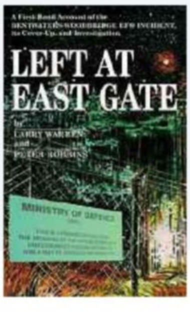
Mainstream ufology has always revolved around large and dramatic cases: Thomas Mantell, Adamski & Co, UMMO, Betty and Barney Hill, Gulf Breeze, Roswell, Rendlesham, Cash-Landrum, the Phoenix Lights, Linda Napolitano *alias* Cortile, and so on. All manner of battles have raged over them, although anyone lacking an axe to grind could see from the get-go that there were huge holes in any argument that they were inexplicable, let alone evidence for ET wanting to signal us rather than just to phone home. While 'alien abductions' seem to have faded away as a central focus of ufological attention, Roswell and Rendlesham rumble on. The trouble from the proponents' point of view is both continue to fall apart, if in different ways.

Take the latest on Rendlesham, for a start. One of the outliers in this case has been Larry Warren, who was supposedly out in the forest on one of the nights in question but apparently wasn't, and then told horrific stories of being drugged and interrogated by AFOSI agents afterwards. With Peter Robbins as co-author he published *Left at East Gate* (1997), which regaled us all with his tale. Robbins has now announced that he believes Warren was more than somewhat economical with the truth in putting their book together, and wishes to put some distance between them. Nick Pope (remember him?) has backed Robbins's claims on his Facebook page; Warren has attacked Pope in a YouTube rant ("I'll still be standing tall when you go cock-a-doodle-do"). Meanwhile Messrs Halt, Burroughs and Pendleton have their different, but keenly evolving, different takes on the Rendlesham Incident.

Roswell 'explanations' likewise persist in evolving, as myths and legends do. Now we have Dr Irena Scott announcing a new book, *UFOs Today: 70 Years of Lies, Misinformation and Government Cover-up*, from Flying Disk Press, "which covers new witnesses to the Roswell crash and bodies, and much additional smoking gun information." This had better be good. We shall see. Meanwhile, one-time head of Blue Book Major Robert J Friend has announced that he thinks 'Roswell' was an accident involving an unarmed nuclear device. It's interesting that latter-day Roswell 'revelations' increasingly call on mundane if outlandish notions to solve the supposed mystery while adding much *garam masala* to the mix, so those in the cheap seats all go "Phwooar!" and those in boxes cry "Wooo!".

Major Friend thinks Roswell was an accident involving an unarmed nuclear device

And then there is the Mutual UFO Network, a kind of mystery unto itself. MUFON was established by the late Walt Andrus and others as a breakaway from the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), in 1969. It currently claims about 3,000 members which, in a current US population of some 325 million, doesn't quite make it as a mass movement (the American Communist Party boasts about the same membership). MUFON is a tax exempt, non-profit organisation, a category gained by stating its aims as "scientific education" and being devoted to the "scientific investigation" of UFOs. Its 2017 Symposium (www.mufonsymposium.com) includes speakers claiming to offer evidence of, among other things, blue avians (what are they? Surely not deceased Norwegian parrots?), a hollow Earth (presumably ours: my Lord Clancarty, where are you now?), Mars jumpers (made from Martian sheep wool? What?), Barack Obama: Teen Space Soldier (yes, really; see **FT286:21, 351:48-51**), draconian reptilians and shapeshifters, intergalactic space war, underwater UFO bases, Nazi bases in Antarctica, Nazi flying saucers (old and shrivelled chestnuts both), stargates, the galactic alliance, galactic diplomacy, the Illuminati conspiracy (what is older than an old chestnut?), the Kennedy assassination UFO conspiracy (I do wish people would just accept that Elvis Presley hid in a manhole, popped up and blew the guy away because he was jealous of JFK's relationship with Marilyn Monroe), Pleiadians (them again), the Nordic extraterrestrial alliance (oh aye), the government mind control programme, the "real" USS *Enterprise* starship, fluxliner flying saucers (solder on?), and so forth. The symposium's title is "The Case for a Secret Space Program", which is ambiguous at best – any nation that can will have one of those, and precious little it will have to do with conspiring with the Galactic overlords.



There was a time when MUFON symposia featured the best and brightest of American ufologists with some incisive things to say, within their own frame of reference. In those days, there *was* a 'mainstream' ufology, and it knew what the lunatic fringe was. Alas no longer, it seems. This stuff has no more to do with "scientific investigation" than my cat Esme Weatherwax has to do with breeding racing snails. The fringe is in the middle.

Close encounters of the Hynek kind

JENNY RANDLES recalls the pioneering UFO investigations of Dr J Allen Hynek

This autumn marks the 40th anniversary of the most influential Hollywood movie in UFO history, and the only one named after our own terminology: Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (or *CE3K*). Its title was so baffling to cinemagoers back in 1977 they had to have it explained to them in a special promo trailing the blockbuster.

That advert was presented by Dr J Allen Hynek, whose book *The UFO Experience* was the source of Steven Spielberg's decision to make a 'true to life' film about UFO experiences. It revealed how something extraordinary can transform the life of an ordinary person, and what science might do about it. The movie worked by teaming a brilliant young film-maker who'd loved science fiction as a kid with a respected space scientist who studied UFOs. This made *CE3K* into an unusually literate and intelligent science fiction film, and certainly the first big-budget cinema release to treat UFOs as a concept rather than a prop. Sadly, it was also one of the last.

I was lucky to know Allen during his last decade, when he had brought together serious investigators and scientists to work (quietly, as many feared it might harm their careers) in what was termed an 'Invisible College', brainstorming ideas and moving research forward after the US government closed the Air Force investigation team that Allen advised. Just after *CE3K* came out, I travelled across the US with this kind and generous man and his wife Mimi – visiting Boulder, Colorado, to meet scientists whose work ended with that USAF project but who knew they had not resolved the UFO mystery. I also later house sat for Allen in Evanston, Illinois, and saw just how many well-known figures from different fields respected him.

As a young astronomer in post-war Dayton, Ohio, Hynek had been invited to act as scientific consultant to the Air Force study at the local Wright Patterson base, where he reviewed their files up to 1969. He explained any reports he could and tried to dig deeper into more promising close encounters. He told me that he never had the opportunity to explore the best reports, as the scientist in him wanted to do, USAF bureaucracy and growing disillusion that UFOs were a military problem scuppering his attempts.

So in many respects he was happy to be free after the project closed and to embrace looser bonds with fellow scientists. One of these was Dr Jacques Vallée, who was encouraged to move from France to the computer hotbed of California with an eye to his unique insights helping establish scientific credibility for the field. Not a hard science man like Hynek, the highly intelligent Vallée was more interested in the cultural impact of the UFO phenomenon and how it manifests through the ages in different societies. He became the architect of a 'new ufology': this 'psychosocial' approach to ufology was established in France, and saw its flagship journal (*Magonia*, named for one of Vallée's books) published in the UK; it was less prominent in America, perhaps because, as a military world leader at the forefront of space exploration, the US tended to focus on the concept of UFOs as machines, not denizens of our collective unconscious. That the movie industry was based in the US was also relevant: it put 'bums on seats' by emphasising alien invasion rather than 'softer' ideas that would baffle audiences.

So, *Close Encounters* inevitably took many previously unknown cases based on Hynek's book and employed trailblazing special effects to forge a US vision of alien UFOs. The movie builds from 'first kind' sightings at a distance to those with physical effects, and climaxes with an alien landing at Devil's Tower, Wyoming, in front of waiting scientists. But along the way there are unmistakable undertones of the new, Vallée-influenced ufology, with hidden psychological triggers driving disparate witnesses towards the secret rendezvous. The government science team in *CE3K* is headed by Lacombe, played by esteemed French director François Truffaut; cinemagoers at the time were baffled by a Frenchman running a UFO agency in the USA (though he's actually a UN adviser) and why he delivered such baffling lines such as: "It is an event *sociologique*." But in French 'La Combe' means 'Valley', and his musings reflect those of the real Vallée.

Few in the audience would have made such subtle connections; Hynek, though, was overtly present in the film's climactic scenes, playing himself as child-like beings descend from the UFO and stand in front of awestruck scientists. He told me his scenes were cut short in the release, and he had filmed one in which the aliens are fascinated by his beard and come up to stroke it! Given that he turned down opportunities to film lucrative TV ads where aliens sold things like beer, it's easy to forgive him this one indulgence. Indeed, such scenes are typical of both his modesty and quirky sense of humour. He impressed me on the road with his deep knowledge of Monty Python and his eye for a joke. One time at a Midwest truckstop, he took off his belt and threw it on the table in front of me. As I gaped, he made a call from a phone booth and delighted in handing me over to "someone you might know, as you took astronomy at college". The man on the line was pioneer space scientist James Van Allen, who in 1958 discovered the radiation layers named after him. Van Allen and Allen Hynek were friends who discussed UFOs amicably. Allen smiled at me and pointed to his discarded belt on the table noting: "*He* discovered the Van Allen radiation belt. *There* is my own Allen belt."

Hynek never made a fortune out of *Close Encounters* – although Spielberg funded some UFO research. Of course, the first two words in the film's title – 'close encounter' – are now a common phrase, even if often far removed from its original meaning.

When *CE3K* was released in Britain in early 1978 I coordinated some promotional work and attended the premiere. A national newspaper ran a 'UFO Bureau', tying real British cases to the movie and setting up a 'hotline' for readers to report sightings. Hundreds of witnesses came forward, and I waded through hours of recorded calls and letters sent in by them. Investigators for BUFORA and *Flying Saucer Review* took these on, so some classic cases entered UFO history as a result of *Close Encounters*, the result of a unique interaction between the British UFO community and the media. I will look at some of this aftermath next month.

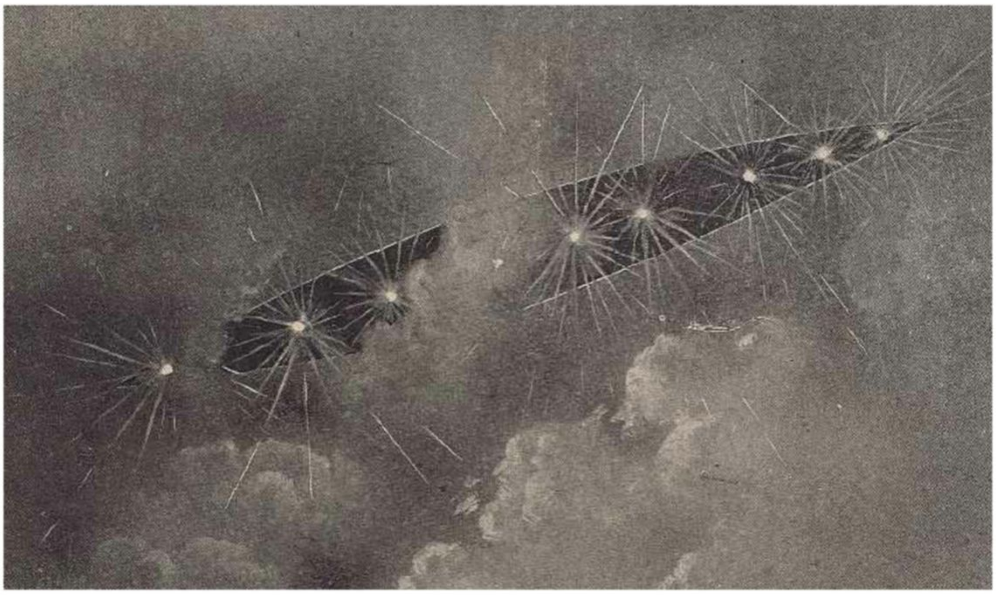
None of this would have happened but for the work of Dr J Allen Hynek, a true pioneer of UFO investigation, and, happily, a biography has recently been published: *The Close Encounters Man*, by Mark O'Connell (Harper Collins, 2017). Allen once said that he sympathised with Mark Twain, who was born during an appearance of Halley's Comet and always sensed that he would die on its return 76 years later. Twain's intuition proved exactly correct. Allen told me that the same rule likely applied to him, his birth coinciding with this cycle of the comet in 1910 (days after Twain died), and he was also sadly right: He died at Halley's next return in April 1986.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

70 THE AIRSHIPS FROM ATLANTIS

THEO PAIJMANS finds a surprising early example of a fortean coinage in a Victorian precursor of *The Fly*.



LEFT: An Atlantean airship in flight, from *A Dweller in Two Planets*. **BELOW:** Shivkar Bapuji Talpade.

The history of aviation is in error, a group of English savants concluded in 1908. When the scholars translated the Vedas into English, they stumbled across numerous references to Atlantis – "a very advanced civilisation", according to the text – but they also found descriptions of a flying machine resembling the most advanced models of that time.[1] Just the year before, an inventor had published a book in Bombay containing plans for an aeroplane derived from the Vedas. His name was Shivkar Bapuji Talpade and, so the story goes, he built an unmanned aeroplane around 1890 that he successfully flew in 1895. Talpade was also a scholar of Sanskrit literature and the Vedas, and his study of these ancient texts had led him to his aeronautical invention.[2]

> "The salons of the great airships had libraries, musical instruments, and potted plants, amongst the flowers of which birds darted about..."

Some claim that Talpade constructed his plane under the guidance of a mystic named Pandit Subbaraya Shastry. Shastry was the author of the *Vaimanika Shastra*, a Sanskrit text he obtained through channelling and automatic writing. It claimed that the *vimanas* in the ancient Sanskrit texts were advanced flying devices. In 1974 a team of scientists at Bangalore's Institute of Science concluded that the *Vaimanika Shastra* was written somewhere between 1900 and 1922, and that rather than containing blueprints and advanced designs of ancient flying machines it was a hodgepodge of unworkable ideas.[3] Talpade's invention too slipped into the mists of history. Some say he sold it, others that he lost interest after his wife had died.

Notwithstanding the controversial origin of the *Vaimanika Shastra*, it belongs to a larger canon of channelled stories about fabulous airships from a dim past, in an alternative universe where the kingdom of Atlantis is seen as more than myth. The trend started with theosophy: Madame Blavatsky, for instance, briefly mentions balloons with devastating death rays. According to her they were described in "instructions found in the *Ashtar Vidya*".[4]

Theosophist William Scott-Elliot described the Atlantean airships in more detail in his *The Story of Atlantis* (1896). He had received this knowledge by astral clairvoyance, as was explained in the preface. His Atlantean airships resemble decked-over boats, for "when at full speed it could not have been convenient, even if safe, for any on board to remain on the upper deck. Their propelling and steering gear could be brought into use at either end." They flew with *vril* or through some other force. Their construction was a costly affair, so that the use of these wonderful machines was limited to the Atlantean higher classes. The airships grew in size towards the end of Atlantis with its wars and uproars: "... battleships that could navigate the air had to a great extent replaced the battleships at sea – having naturally proved far more powerful engines of destruction. These were constructed to carry as many as 50, and in some cases even up to 100 fighting men."

The earlier 'air-boats' were constructed out of wood, "the boards used being exceedingly thin, but the injection of some substance which did not add materially to the weight, while it gave leather-like toughness, provided the necessary combination of lightless and strength." Later ones were constructed out of an aluminium-like alloy that was even lighter in weight. "Over the rough framework of the air-boat was extended a large sheet of this metal which was then beaten into shape and electrically welded when necessary. But whether built of metal or wood their outside surface was apparently seamless and perfectly smooth, and they shone in the dark as if coated with luminous paint."[5]

A book that in some quarters has lost nothing of its lustre should have preceded Scott-Elliott's astral visions, except that between the time of writing and actual publication lay almost 20 years. *A Dweller in Two Planets* was completed in 1886 but only published in 1905. It was dictated by 'a spirit' to 17-year-old Frederick S Oliver, who never saw its publication, as he died in 1899. The detailed descriptions of the technology of Atlantis still make for interesting reading. The most prominent landmark of the Atlantean capital Caiphul, for instance, was a giant tower of pure aluminium, soaring nearly 3,000ft above sea level. The city itself drew its energy from the sea, while crystal tubes lit the Atlantean habitats with a continuous light derived from the 'Night-Side forces'. The Atlanteans travelled around by a network of monorails and had wireless Internet: "The conveyance of images of light, pictures of forms, as well as of sound and of heat, just as the telephone thou knowest so well conveys images of sound, only in Poseid no wires or other sensible material connection was required in the use, at whatever distance, of either telephones or telephotes, nor even in clairvoyance, that is, heat-conduction."

The Atlanteans also used submarines, but their greatest invention was the cigar-shaped airships, called vailxa: "The salons of the great passenger vailxa had libraries, musical instruments, and potted plants, amongst the flowers of which birds similar to the modern domestic canary darted about". The principle of propulsion was "the 'repulsion by levitation'… It meant aerial navigation without wings or unwieldy gas-reservoirs..." [6] The book even features an intriguing illustration of such a magnificent airship in flight.

In 1908, a child spirit named Jonathan told nine-year-old 'Laurie' about Atlantis and its airships. In this version, the Atlanteans had many different aerial machines with which they flew high over the sea, as the spirit-child related in a chapter devoted entirely to these airships. The machines were propelled by 'Scear-force' that was also used in lamps. From the age of two, Atlantean children were taught about the use of Scear-force to power airships, first on the ground, in the form of small automobiles, or on the water. The airships had both propellers and blades. There were different types of airships, bladder-like affairs three of four times the size of current balloons, with boat-shaped carriages hanging beneath them, and metal propellers at both ends. These vast balloons were filled with Scear-force. Another airship resembled a pair of spread wings, 20-30ft long, with a square house or box in the middle. The 'house' was divided into two parts, one containing the machinery, the other the passengers. This 'bird-machine' could reach extremely high altitudes. The Atlanteans also had an 'arrow-machine' with a tubular gasbag. [7]

Other authors had different ideas. No gasbags, balloons, flying boats or cigar-shaped airships flew over Atlantis, according to J Ben Leslie, who insisted that giant replicas of Atlantean eagles were the norm. In his behemoth of a tome entitled *Atlantis Restored* (1911, and numbering some 800 pages) Leslie solemnly declared that no less than four Atlantean spirits, one of them named Alem Prolex, had assisted him. Like Olivier, who had already explained that ordinary ships became obsolete with the advent of the airship, Leslie writes that the Atlanteans "generally preferred aerial navigation to that of water, and but a few water craft were used for the accommodation of passengers on the local waters…" These boats were propelled by what Leslie terms an "electric force". Like Olivier, Leslie had obtained his visions many years before they saw publication in book form. All the detail on the Atlantean airships, for instance, "was given us by Yer-mah in 1893, and the balance in 1904, when we revised the article. It will thus be seen that we have in no way been influenced by the later development of aviators," Leslie assures the reader.

Leslie's Atlantean airships are quite different from Scott-Elliot's oval craft, Olivier's cigar-shaped vailxa, Shastry's Vimanas or Jonathan's multitude of forms. Named 'Telta Aeta', they were constructed from "a model in representation of the Delis, or large Atlantean Eagle, and in exact mathematical proportions, though many times larger, in accord with the utility to which it was to be placed. The exact form and symmetry of the Delis were maintained. The legs and feet were used for rests when not in motion. The wings, when in motion, were operated by machinery, with a motive force of electricity, of which there was a constant supply, as it was drawn direct from the atmosphere. This not only kept the Telta Aeta afloat on the air, but was also the means by which it was heated and lighted. The wings not only propelled the Telta Aeta through space, but were also the means by which it was guided. In its body, near the top, were compartments and saloons for passengers. Underneath and centrally, on the bottom, was a portion of the electric machinery, while the finer and more intricate parts had place in the wings, the former and the latter having respective electric connection. At the sides were storerooms for baggage or light freight."

The airships were constructed from a light metal, "similar in appearance to modern aluminium, strong, impenetrable and possessing a great magnetic force, which virtues were exalted by low, and diminished by high temperature; hence, a material capable, in itself, of any temperature. This material was obtained by the action of sodium on the sesquichloride of chromium, as prepared by the Atlanteans. It could not be oxidised by air, and was of such specific gravity that it was not much heavier." [8]

The 19th century obsession with Atlantis had started with Ignatius L Donnelly's immensely successful *Atlantis, the Antediluvian World* (1882). This nostalgia for a lost Golden Age of mankind, when man rose from barbarity to civilisation, was ignited at the same time that many aviation pioneers were trying to master powered flight. Since Atlantis had been a more highly developed civilisation than our own, it would clearly have accomplished what we at the time still had not. The descriptions of the Atlantean airships share a common denominator: had they been built according to these channelled instructions and descriptions, none of them would have actually flown, the *vimanas* included. The Atlantean airships mostly resemble their 19th century experimental counterparts, with a pinch of wishful conjecture added here or there. Whether tubular bags filled with exotic gases, carriages hanging beneath them, or contraptions with wings like Lilienthal gliders, the fabulous Atlantean vessels were echoes of the shapes and forms we were experimenting with at the time.

But with new times came new interpretations. In 1923, when aviation had made tremendous leaps forward, a newspaper mentioned that: "There has just been brought to light in an ancient manuscript the statement that Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba 'a vessel wherein one could traverse the air (or winds) which Solomon had made by the wisdom that God has given unto him'." The statement was taken from the preface by Col. Lockwood Marsh, secretary of the Royal Aeronautical Society of England, who referred to an ancient Abyssinian manuscript entitled 'The Glory of the Kings', translated by Wallis E Budge. "This ancient manuscript has, of course, been translated many times, Col. Lockwood Marsh told the *Westminster Gazette*, "but the statement about Solomon's airship apparently escaped the notion of the reviewers, and it has been left to a flying enthusiast like myself to discover and proclaim it." [9]

NOTES

1 François de Nion, 'Chronique de Paris et d'ailleurs', *Romans de la Mode illustrée, Supplément Littéraire*, Paris, 9 Feb 1908, p47.

2 Dileep Kumar Kanjilal, *Vimana in Ancient India, Calcutta*, 1985, pages 101-102, 122-123. Quite a few American newspapers published Talpade's claim in 1952 and 1953.

3 HS Mukunda, SM Deshpande, HR Nagendra, A Prabhu, & SP Govindraju, "A critical study of the work *Vyamanika Shastra*", *Scientific Opinion*: 5-12, 1974.

4 Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 1888, TPS, Book I, Part II, p555.

5 W Scott-Elliott, *The Story Of Atlantis*, 1896, pp51-54.

6 Frederick S Oliver, *A Dweller On Two Planets*, Baumgarter, 1905, pp60-67.

7 William Kingsland, *A Child's Story of Atlantis*, 1908.

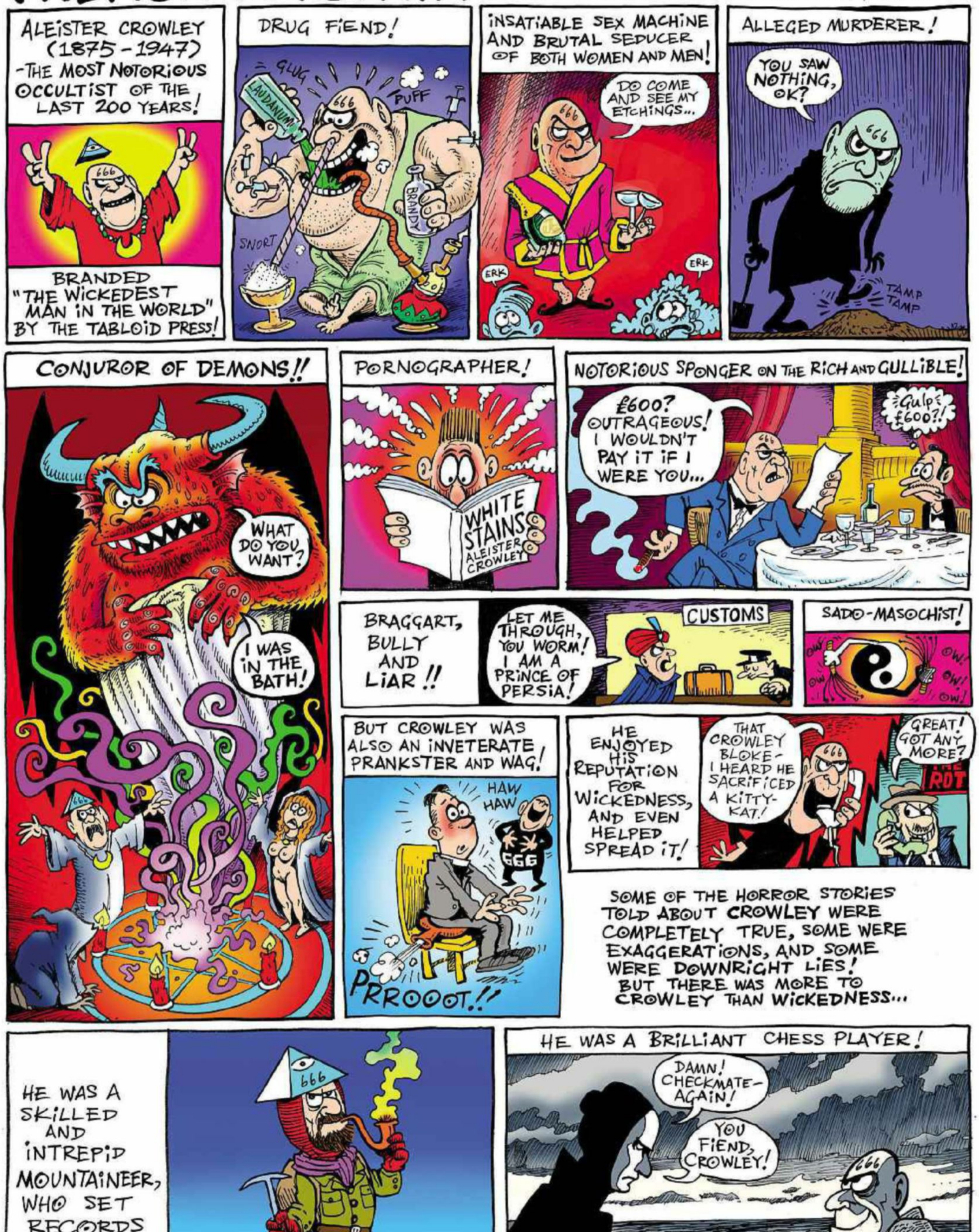
8 J Ben Leslie, *Atlantis Restored*, Austin Publishing Company, 1911, pp12, 207-211.

9 'Solomon Gave Airplane to Queen', *Daily Kennebec Journal*, 22 Oct 1923.

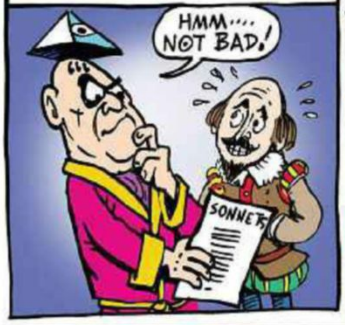
PHENOMENOMIX

ALEISTER CROWLEY

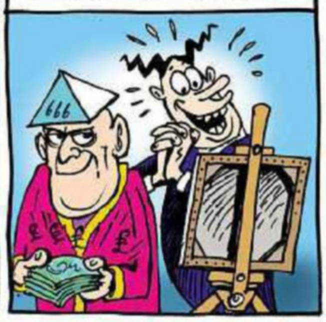
HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON


ALEISTER CROWLEY (1875-1947) -THE MOST NOTORIOUS OCCULTIST OF THE LAST 200 YEARS!
666
BRANDED "THE WICKEDEST MAN IN THE WORLD" BY THE TABLOID PRESS!
DRUG FIEND!
GLUG
LAUDANUM
666
PUFF
BRANDY
SNORT
INSATIABLE SEX MACHINE AND BRUTAL SEDUCER OF BOTH WOMEN AND MEN!
DO COME AND SEE MY ETCHINGS...
666
ERK
ERK
ALLEGED MURDERER!
YOU SAW NOTHING, OK?
666
TAMP TAMP
CONJUROR OF DEMONS!!
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I WAS IN THE BATH!
666
PORNOGRAPHER!
WHITE STAINS ALEISTER CROWLEY
NOTORIOUS SPONGER ON THE RICH AND GULLIBLE!
£600? OUTRAGEOUS! I WOULDN'T PAY IT IF I WERE YOU...
Gulp £600?!
666
BRAGGART, BULLY AND LIAR !!
LET ME THROUGH, YOU WORM! I AM A PRINCE OF PERSIA!
CUSTOMS
SADO-MASOCHIST!
OW! OW! OW! OW! OW!
BUT CROWLEY WAS ALSO AN INVETERATE PRANKSTER AND WAG!
HAW HAW
666
PRROOOT.!!
HE ENJOYED HIS REPUTATION FOR WICKEDNESS, AND EVEN HELPED SPREAD IT!
THAT CROWLEY BLOKE- I HEARD HE SACRIFICED A KITTY-KAT!
GREAT! GOT ANY MORE?
666
THE ROT
SOME OF THE HORROR STORIES TOLD ABOUT CROWLEY WERE COMPLETELY TRUE, SOME WERE EXAGGERATIONS, AND SOME WERE DOWNRIGHT LIES! BUT THERE WAS MORE TO CROWLEY THAN WICKEDNESS...
HE WAS A SKILLED AND INTREPID MOUNTAINEER, WHO SET RECORDS IN THE HIMALAYAS!
666
HE WAS A BRILLIANT CHESS PLAYER!
DAMN! CHECKMATE-AGAIN!
YOU FIEND, CROWLEY!
666

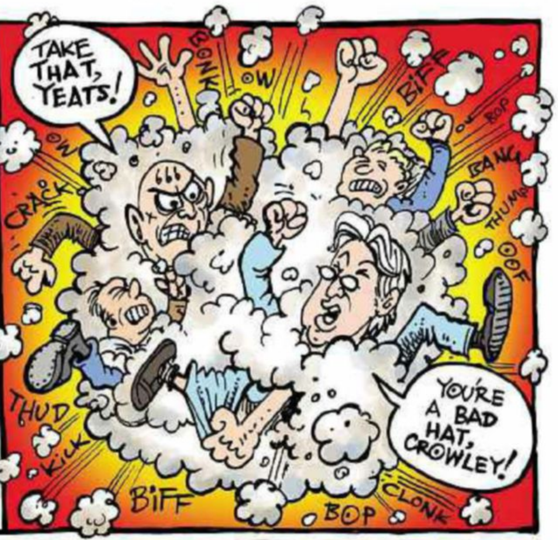
HIS EARLIEST AMBITION WAS TO BE THE GREATEST ENGLISH POET SINCE SHAKESPEARE...


HMM.... NOT BAD!
SONNET

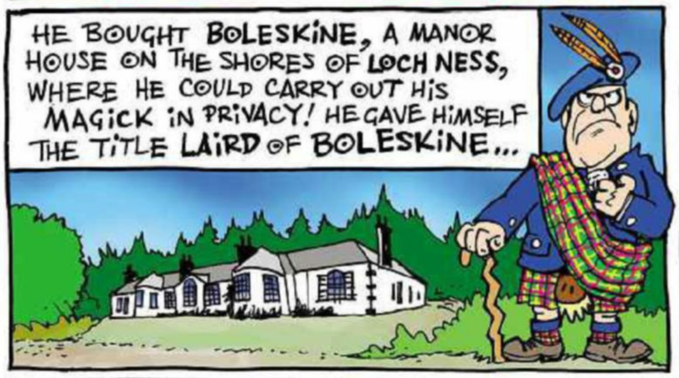
HE DEVOTED HIMSELF TO **PAINTING**, AND SOME PEOPLE ACTUALLY **LIKED** HIS WORK...



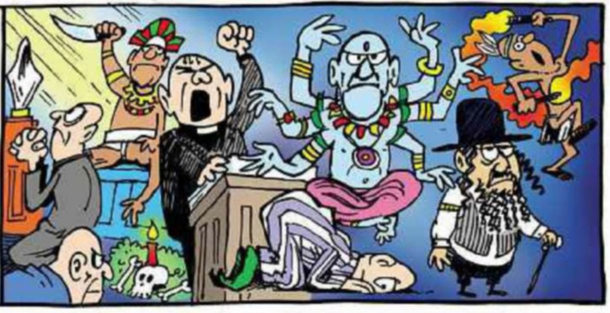
BUT ABOVE ALL, HE WAS AN **OCCULTIST!** AT THE AGE OF **23** HE WAS INITIATED INTO THE HERMETIC ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DAWN – THE MOST DISTINGUISHED OCCULT CLUB IN BRITAIN! IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE HE FELL OUT WITH THE OTHER MEMBERS...


TAKE THAT, YEATS!
CLONK
OW
BIFF
BOP
BANG
THUMP
OOF
OW
CRACK
THUD
KICK
BIFF
BOP
CLONK
YOU'RE A BAD HAT, CROWLEY!

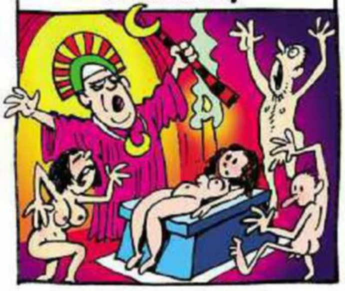
HE BOUGHT **BOLESKINE**, A MANOR HOUSE ON THE SHORES OF **LOCH NESS**, WHERE HE COULD CARRY OUT HIS **MAGICK** IN **PRIVACY!** HE GAVE HIMSELF THE TITLE **LAIRD** OF **BOLESKINE**...



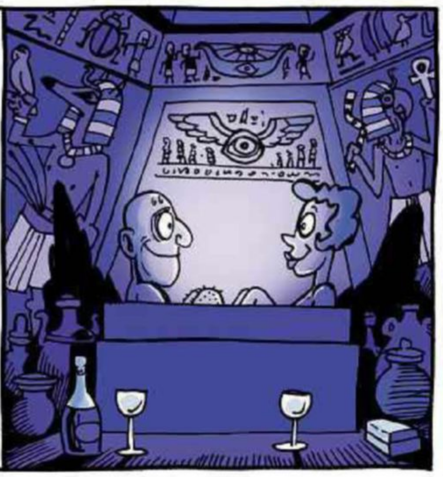
IN HIS TWENTIES AND THIRTIES, CROWLEY ALSO STUDIED MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS...



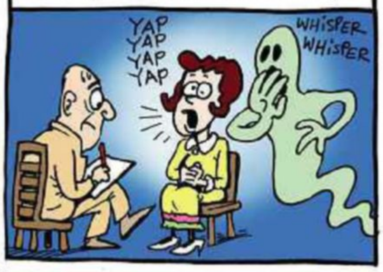
BUT EVENTUALLY HE DECIDED TO FOUND HIS OWN RELIGION – **CROWLEYANITY**, OR, MORE FORMALLY – **THELEMA!**



HE TRAVELLED THE WORLD – MEXICO, **EGYPT, INDIA, FRANCE, CEYLON** (SRI LANKA)... HE MARRIED HIS FIRST WIFE, **ROSE**, IN CAIRO, AND THEY SPENT THEIR **HONEYMOON** NIGHT IN A CHAMBER OF THE **GREAT PYRAMID** – IT WAS "FLOODED WITH A MYSTICAL LIGHT!"

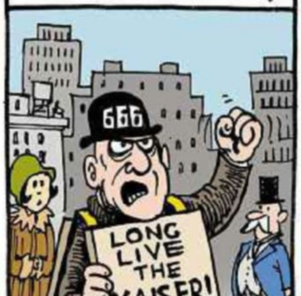


ALSO IN CAIRO, HE **"TOOK DICTATION"** FROM A SPIRIT FOR A TEXT CALLED ***"THE BOOK OF THE LAW,"*** ANNOUNCING THE **AGE OF HORUS**... TO BE DOMINATED BY CROWLEY **HIMSELF!**

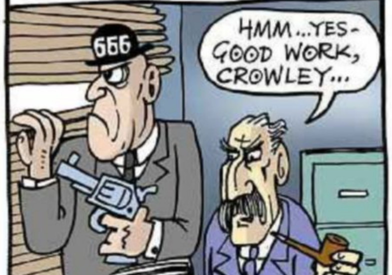

YAP YAP YAP YAP
WHISPER WHISPER

HIS MARRIAGE DIDN'T LAST LONG! HE WENT ON ADVENTURES... AT ONE POINT HE PUT TOGETHER A **GIRL BAND**, THE **RAGGED RAG-TIME GIRLS**, AND TOOK THEM ON **TOUR** TO **RUSSIA!**

CROWLEY SPENT MOST OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN **AMERICA**, NOISILY AGITATING **AGAINST** BRITAIN AND **FOR** GERMANY!


666
LONG LIVE THE KAISER! BOO TO BRITAIN!

LATER, HE WOULD CLAIM HE'D BEEN WORKING IN SECRET FOR **BRITISH INTELLIGENCE** AS A FIFTH COLUMNIST...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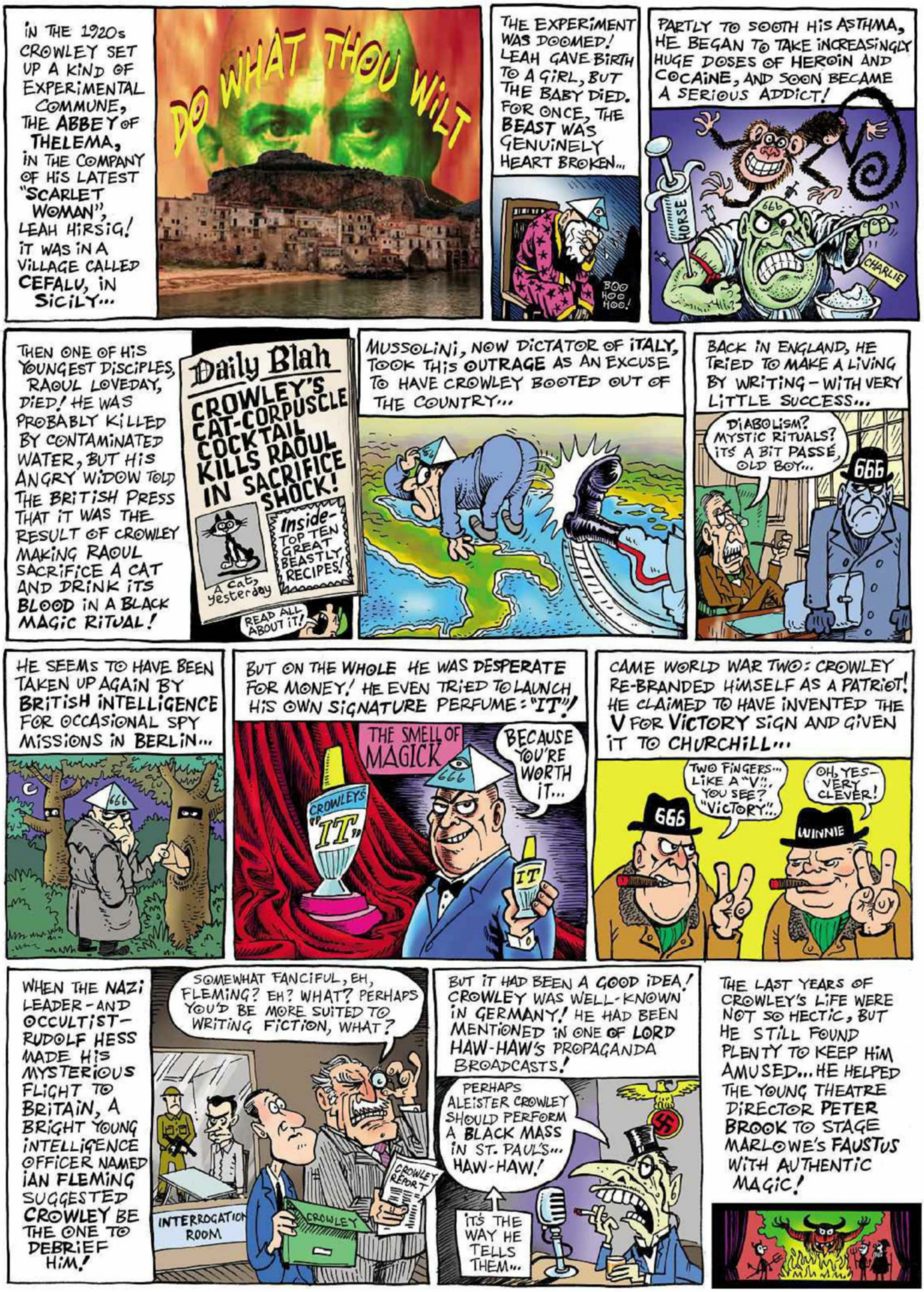
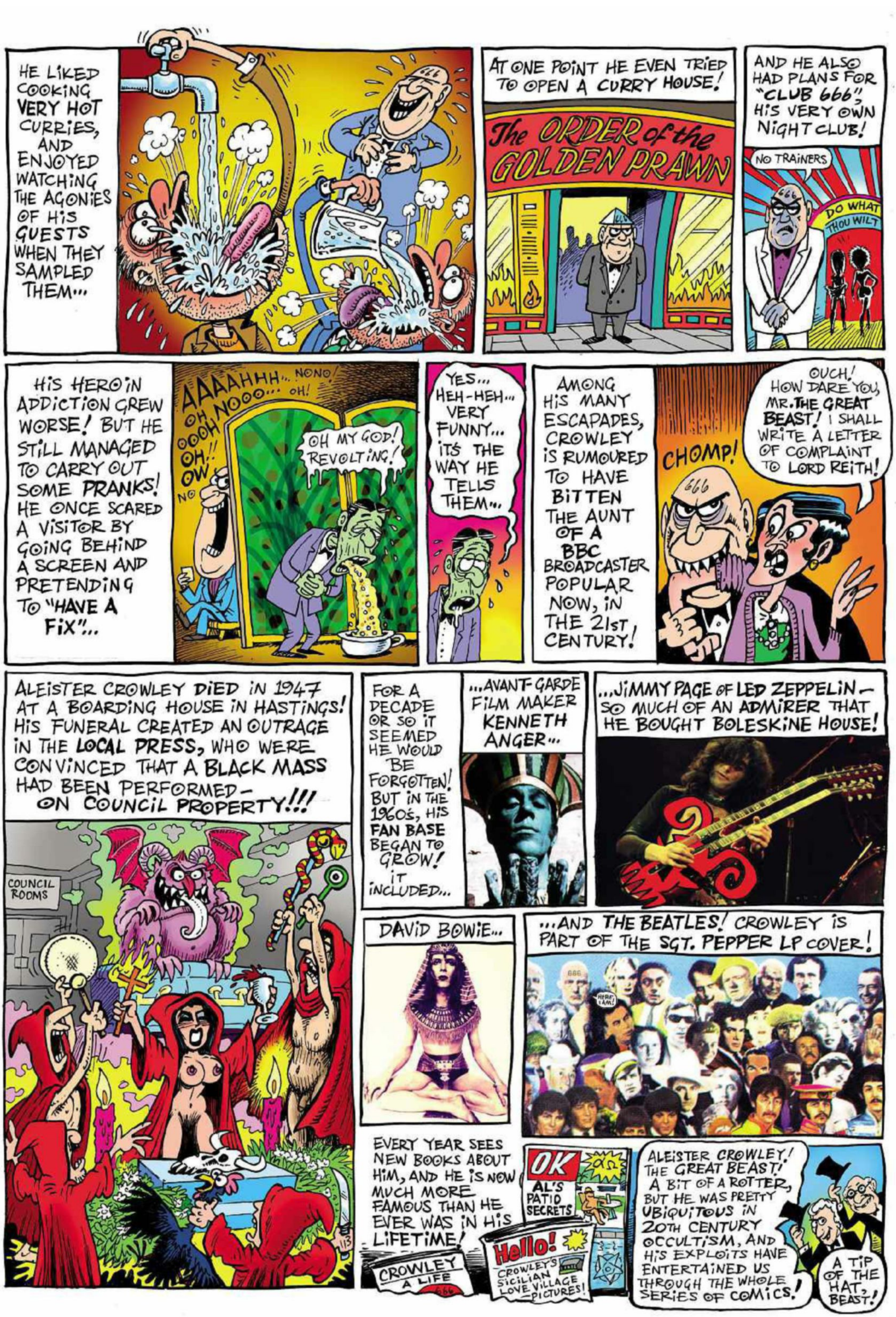
HMM... YES- GOOD WORK, CROWLEY...
M

RECENT RESEARCH SUGGESTS – UNLIKELY AS THIS SEEMS – THAT HE WAS TELLING THE TRUTH!


IN THE 1920s CROWLEY SET UP A KIND OF EXPERIMENTAL COMMUNE, THE ABBEY OF THELEMA, IN THE COMPANY OF HIS LATEST "SCARLET WOMAN", LEAH HIRSIG! IT WAS IN A VILLAGE CALLED CEFALU, IN SICILY...
DO WHAT THOU WILT
THE EXPERIMENT WAS DOOMED! LEAH GAVE BIRTH TO A GIRL, BUT THE BABY DIED. FOR ONCE, THE BEAST WAS GENUINELY HEART BROKEN...
BOO HOO HOO!
PARTLY TO SOOTH HIS ASTHMA, HE BEGAN TO TAKE INCREASINGLY HUGE DOSES OF HEROIN AND COCAINE, AND SOON BECAME A SERIOUS ADDICT!
HORSE
666
CHARLIE
THEN ONE OF HIS YOUNGEST DISCIPLES, RAOUL LOVEDAY, DIED! HE WAS PROBABLY KILLED BY CONTAMINATED WATER, BUT HIS ANGRY WIDOW TOLD THE BRITISH PRESS THAT IT WAS THE RESULT OF CROWLEY MAKING RAOUL SACRIFICE A CAT AND DRINK ITS BLOOD IN A BLACK MAGIC RITUAL!
Daily Blah
CROWLEY'S CAT-CORPUSCLE COCKTAIL KILLS RAOUL IN SACRIFICE SHOCK!
A cat, yesterday
Inside- TOP TEN GREAT BEASTLY RECIPES!
READ ALL ABOUT IT!
MUSSOLINI, NOW DICTATOR OF ITALY, TOOK THIS OUTRAGE AS AN EXCUSE TO HAVE CROWLEY BOOTED OUT OF THE COUNTRY...
666
BACK IN ENGLAND, HE TRIED TO MAKE A LIVING BY WRITING - WITH VERY LITTLE SUCCESS...
DIABOLISM? MYSTIC RITUALS? ITS A BIT PASSÉ, OLD BOY...
666
HE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN UP AGAIN BY BRITISH INTELLIGENCE FOR OCCASIONAL SPY MISSIONS IN BERLIN...
666
BUT ON THE WHOLE HE WAS DESPERATE FOR MONEY! HE EVEN TRIED TO LAUNCH HIS OWN SIGNATURE PERFUME: "IT"!
THE SMELL OF MAGICK
CROWLEY'S "IT"
666
BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT...
IT
CAME WORLD WAR TWO: CROWLEY RE-BRANDED HIMSELF AS A PATRIOT! HE CLAIMED TO HAVE INVENTED THE V FOR VICTORY SIGN AND GIVEN IT TO CHURCHILL...
TWO FINGERS... LIKE A "V"! YOU SEE? "VICTORY"!
OH, YES-VERY CLEVER!
666
WINNIE
WHEN THE NAZI LEADER - AND OCCULTIST - RUDOLF HESS MADE HIS MYSTERIOUS FLIGHT TO BRITAIN, A BRIGHT YOUNG INTELLIGENCE OFFICER NAMED IAN FLEMING SUGGESTED CROWLEY BE THE ONE TO DEBRIEF HIM!
SOMEWHAT FANCIFUL, EH, FLEMING? EH? WHAT? PERHAPS YOU'D BE MORE SUITED TO WRITING FICTION, WHAT?
INTERROGATION ROOM
CROWLEY
CROWLEY REPORT
BUT IT HAD BEEN A GOOD IDEA! CROWLEY WAS WELL-KNOWN IN GERMANY! HE HAD BEEN MENTIONED IN ONE OF LORD HAW-HAW'S PROPAGANDA BROADCASTS!
PERHAPS ALEISTER CROWLEY SHOULD PERFORM A BLACK MASS IN ST. PAUL'S... HAW-HAW!
IT'S THE WAY HE TELLS THEM...
THE LAST YEARS OF CROWLEY'S LIFE WERE NOT SO HECTIC, BUT HE STILL FOUND PLENTY TO KEEP HIM AMUSED... HE HELPED THE YOUNG THEATRE DIRECTOR PETER BROOK TO STAGE MARLOWE'S FAUSTUS WITH AUTHENTIC MAGIC!


HE LIKED COOKING VERY HOT CURRIES, AND ENJOYED WATCHING THE AGONIES OF HIS GUESTS WHEN THEY SAMPLED THEM...
AT ONE POINT HE EVEN TRIED TO OPEN A CURRY HOUSE!
The ORDER of the GOLDEN PRAWN
AND HE ALSO HAD PLANS FOR "CLUB 666", HIS VERY OWN NIGHT CLUB!
NO TRAINERS
DO WHAT THOU WILT
HIS HEROIN ADDICTION GREW WORSE! BUT HE STILL MANAGED TO CARRY OUT SOME PRANKS! HE ONCE SCARED A VISITOR BY GOING BEHIND A SCREEN AND PRETENDING TO "HAVE A FIX"...
AAAAHHH... NONO! OH! OH, NOOO... OOOH! OH! OW NO
OH MY GOD! REVOLTING!
YES... HEH-HEH... VERY FUNNY... IT'S THE WAY HE TELLS THEM...
AMONG HIS MANY ESCAPADES, CROWLEY IS RUMOURED TO HAVE BITTEN THE AUNT OF A BBC BROADCASTER POPULAR NOW, IN THE 21ST CENTURY!
CHOMP!
OUCH! HOW DARE YOU, MR. THE GREAT BEAST! I SHALL WRITE A LETTER OF COMPLAINT TO LORD REITH!
ALEISTER CROWLEY DIED IN 1947 AT A BOARDING HOUSE IN HASTINGS! HIS FUNERAL CREATED AN OUTRAGE IN THE LOCAL PRESS, WHO WERE CONVINCED THAT A BLACK MASS HAD BEEN PERFORMED – ON COUNCIL PROPERTY!!!
COUNCIL ROOMS
FOR A DECADE OR SO IT SEEMED HE WOULD BE FORGOTTEN! BUT IN THE 1960'S, HIS FAN BASE BEGAN TO GROW! IT INCLUDED...
...AVANT-GARDE FILM MAKER KENNETH ANGER...
...JIMMY PAGE OF LED ZEPPELIN – SO MUCH OF AN ADMIRER THAT HE BOUGHT BOLESKINE HOUSE!
DAVID BOWIE...
...AND THE BEATLES! CROWLEY IS PART OF THE SGT. PEPPER LP COVER!
HERE I AM!
EVERY YEAR SEES NEW BOOKS ABOUT HIM, AND HE IS NOW MUCH MORE FAMOUS THAN HE EVER WAS IN HIS LIFETIME!
CROWLEY A LIFE
OK
AL'S PATIO SECRETS
Hello!
CROWLEY'S SICILIAN LOVE VILLAGE – PICTURES!
ALEISTER CROWLEY! THE GREAT BEAST! A BIT OF A ROTTER, BUT HE WAS PRETTY UBIQUITOUS IN 20TH CENTURY OCCULTISM, AND HIS EXPLOITS HAVE ENTERTAINED US THROUGH THE WHOLE SERIES OF COMICS!
A TIP OF THE HAT, BEAST!

Socialism, sex and the Solar System

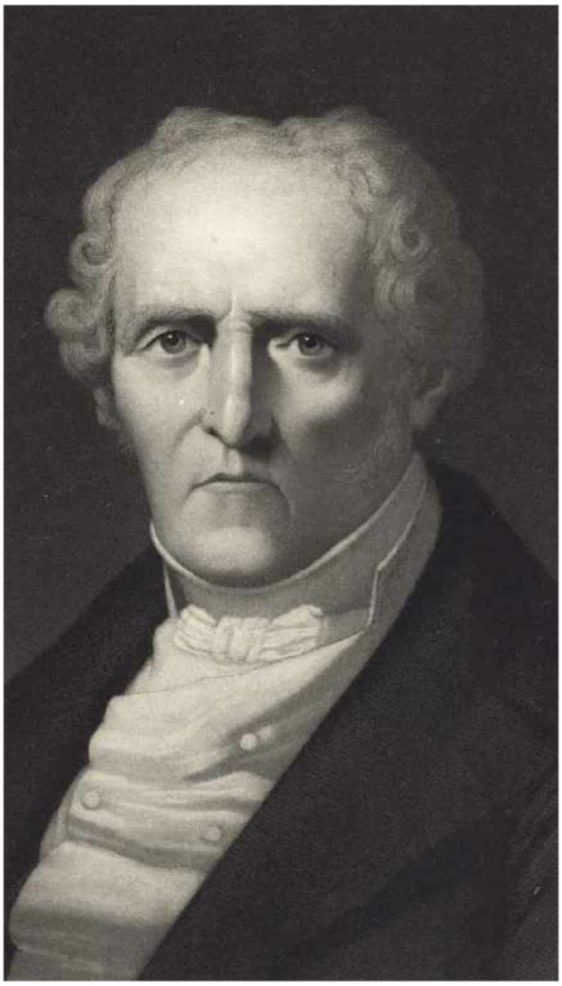
In an extract from his new book, **SD TUCKER** explores the bizarre coital cosmology of Charles Fourier, the French thinker who claimed that Venus had a penis and that bad interplanetary sex was responsible for everything from capitalism to sea monsters.

The French proto-socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837) was one of the first true prophets of the Left, and also one of the oddest. So strange was his vision of the workers' New Jerusalem that during the 20th century he was adopted by the Surrealist André Breton as a kind of mascot of what might be termed 'the politics of the impossible'. But what, precisely, was so strange about his ideas?

Well, Fourier was one of those overly optimistic thinkers who aim to create a universal 'Theory of Everything', and it sometimes seems as if he wrote about every topic under the Sun, from melons to elephants' ears. However, Fourier made his greatest impact in two seemingly separate-sounding areas: cosmology and social reform.

WORKERS' PLAYTIME

Fourier's great overarching theory was that of 'passional attraction', which posited that human beings were naturally motivated not by desire for profit, as the current structure of society suggested, but by natural passions like love.



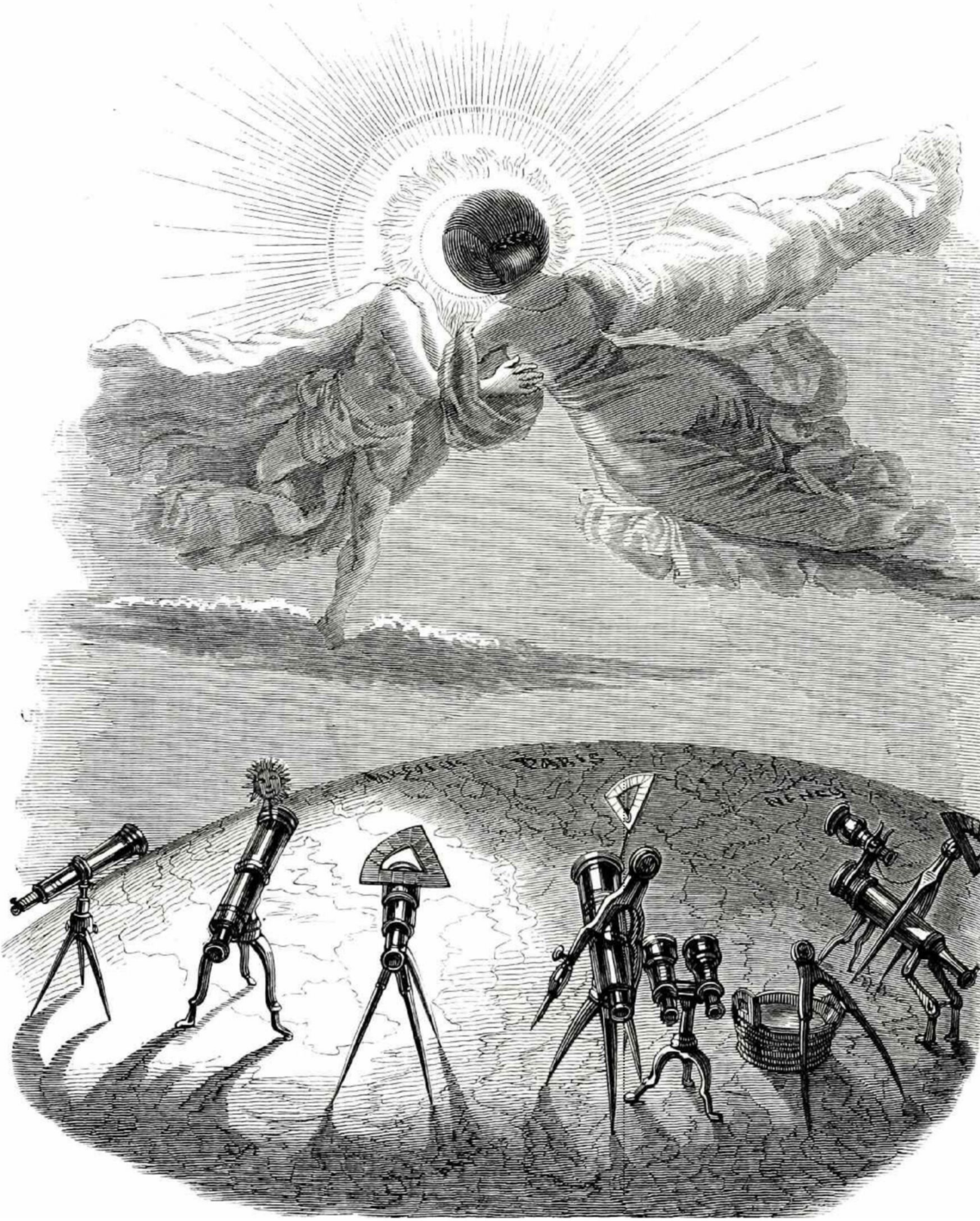
LEFT: Charles Fourier. **FACING PAGE:** An eclipse pictured as a 'conjugal embrace' between the Sun and the Moon in a cartoon by French artist JJ Grandville.

Declaring himself 'The Messiah of Reason', Fourier proposed creating a brand new society in which the true passions of mankind, rather than being suppressed, would be indulged within a novel unit of social organisation termed the 'phalanstery'. Each phalanstery would be a self-contained commune housing exactly 1,620 members, derived from all three genders (Fourier considered children to be a separate sex). Of these, 810 would be women or girls, and 810 men or boys. Fourier arrived at this precise number by somehow managing to work out that there were exactly 810 different human personality-types in existence; which meant that a community of 1,620 would be an entire world in miniature. Within the phalanstery, the currently boring and degrading world of work would be transformed into a pleasurable one of play. For example, each person would be 'scientifically' assigned the job towards which they were most suited; most famously, the "little hordes" of small children would be given the job of toilet-cleaning, seeing as kids everywhere enjoy getting dirty, as well as finding bums and turds inherently funny.

In fact, so pleasing and play-like would everyone's work become that labour would be transformed into a form of surrogate sex. The apparent coiner of the word 'feminism', Fourier – a self-proclaimed "protector of lesbians" – thought that, sexually-speaking, anything should go in the phalansteries; S&M, incest, bestiality, sapphism, homosexuality, group-sex, pædophilia, sodomy, holding hands, whatever. Seeing that the laws of passional attraction drew people to do such things, to prevent them would be as unnatural as stopping a ripe apple falling from its branch, he said, and thus a serious breach of the laws of gravity. Fourier even proposed the creation of a sort of amorous welfare-state safety net, in which each citizen would be guaranteed a certain amount of intercourse. Those left jilted would soon be satisfied by bands of wandering 'fairies', gangs of public-sector whores who would seduce the lovelorn on sight.

This wonderful new 'Age of Harmony', as the phalansterian era was dubbed, would last for 80,000 years and have hugely beneficial effects upon human health. In

In his Harmonic Paradise, humans would evolve into sexual supermen


PARIS
NANCY

Fourier's Harmonic Paradise, humans would evolve into sexual supermen, growing seven feet tall and living to the age of 144, in a world wholly free of illness, misery and pain.

HOW DO YOU LIKE THEM APPLES?

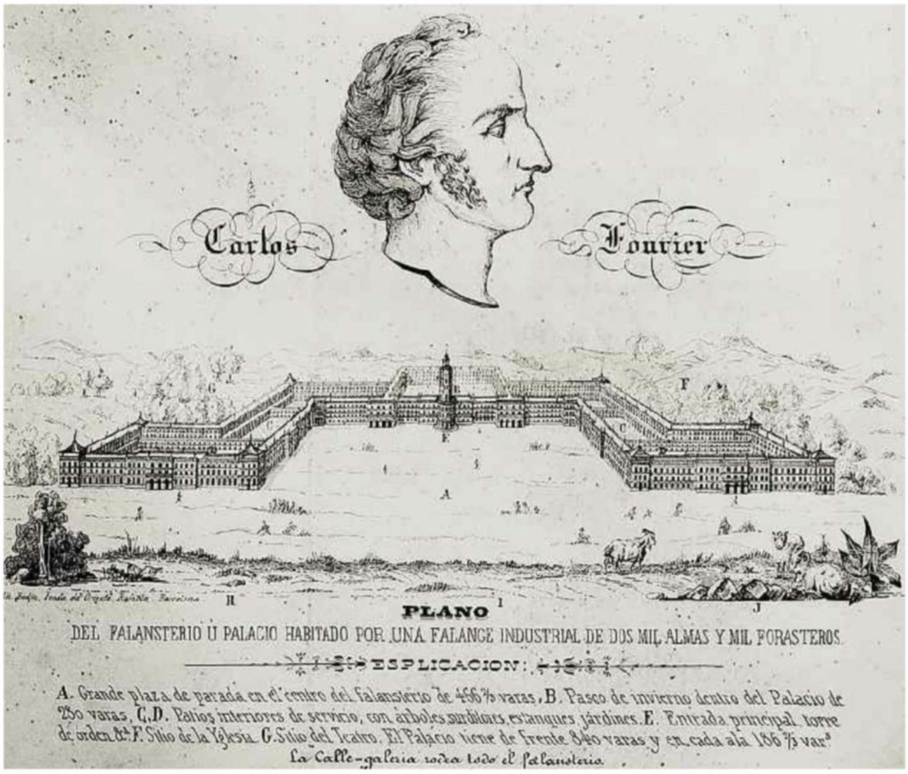
Fourier felt his idea of 'passional attraction' was a continuation of Newton's work on gravitational attraction. "I … have surely completed the task that the Newtonians began and left unfinished," he wrote proudly, while never missing an opportunity to belittle his long-dead rival. Whilst "as a mathematician Newton did all that we had a right to expect from him," Fourier loftily declared, he had nonetheless commenced his studies "at the wrong end of the subject" by focusing his calculations upon "a few secondary branches of Nature's laws" like gravity and motion. Because of Newton's wrong-headedness, the current pseudoscience of astronomy could "only explain the *effects* and not the *causes*" of planetary movements and orbits in space.

In his haunting parable *The Four Apples* Fourier explained how, throughout the long march of history, there had been four separate fruits of immense importance to mankind. First of all, there were the two bad apples: the one with which the biblical Serpent had tempted Eve, and the golden apple that had led to the Trojan War. After this, however, came two counterbalancing good apples: the one which is alleged to have fallen upon Newton's head, giving him the idea for his theory of gravity, and another such fruit which Fourier himself encountered sometime during the 1790s. Whilst walking through Paris one day, Fourier stopped to buy an apple from a vendor. Asking its price, he was shocked to find each fruit cost the equivalent of fourpence, whereas back in the sticks, he could get a dozen apples for a halfpenny. Observing such blatant "extortions" of apple-based commerce was, said Fourier, the final straw that made him realise the corrupt nature of the entire capitalist system and led him to develop the idea of passional attraction.

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

Fourier thought that the major attractive force keeping planets in orbit around their suns was not really Newtonian gravity, but passion. Just as mankind was governed and moved by its own motive passions, so were the heavens. What this meant was that the planets, moons and stars were in some sense living creatures, obsessed with having sex with one another; notoriously, Fourier declared that eclipses were caused by the Sun engaging in a "conjugal embrace" with the Moon, an idea famously satirised by the French cartoonist JJ Grandville.

In Fourier's words: "A planet is a being which has two souls and two sexes, and which procreates like animal or vegetable beings by the meeting of the two generative substances," which are emitted from their two poles. By this, Fourier meant that the North Pole of every planet was male, and the South Pole of every planet female. Each pole was actually a giant genital, emitting a subtle, airy, sperm-like substance, termed 'aroma'. Throughout his work, Fourier is constantly talking about planets emitting aromas onto one another in order to mate and generate life. This sounds initially like they are broadcasting arousing smells out into space, but actually these aromas are better thought of as being a semi-incorporeal 'fluid' which connects the planets together in their own little solar systems throughout the Universe. Basically, such 'aromal fields' were an erotic form of gravity, making planets orbit around their larger suns, or moons around their parent-planets, in much the same way that love-struck teenagers might follow the object of their affections around everywhere they go.


Carlos
Fourier
A
E
F
H
I
J
PLANO
DEL FALANSTERIO Ú PALACIO HABITADO POR UNA FALANGE INDUSTRIAL DE DOS MIL ALMAS Y MIL FORASTEROS
ESPLICACION:
A. Grande plaza de parada en el centro del falansterio de 466⅔ varas, B. Paseo de invierno dentro del Palacio de 280 varas, C, D. Patios interiores de servicio, con árboles surtidores, estanques, jardines. E. Entrada principal torre de orden &ª F. Sitio de la Yglesia G. Sitio del Teatro. El Palacio tiene de frente 840 varas y en cada ala 186⅔ varˢ
La Calle-galeria rodea todo el Falansterio.

ABOVE: A plan for a Fourier-inspired phalanstery. Each would house 1,620 individuals in a self-governing community and become the building blocks of the utopian society he envisaged.

Sometimes, unused stores of this subtle semen could be seen being spurted messily out from a planet's poles in the form of the *aurora borealis* and *aurora australis*, the Northern and Southern Lights. However, should a planet's North and South Pole fancy trying something different, rather than simply mating with one another, they could also choose to emit their aromas out into space, seeking out the polar genitals of other planets; so Jupiter's male North Pole could have aromal sex with Venus's female South Pole, and *vice-versa*. These unions would then produce 'children', in terms of the animals, plants and minerals found on each world. Seeing that many of these cosmic kids were produced via interplanetary gang-bangs involving more than two partners, though, working out the precise parentage of each creature or substance on any given world could be a problem complex enough to defeat even Jeremy Kyle.

SEXUAL HEALING

However, many of the present-day children produced through the Earth's past adventures in galactic sex had gone horribly wrong, with unpleasant animals such as rattlesnakes, sea-monsters and bedbugs infesting the planet.

Fourier explained that these deformed children of the Earth reflected the fact that both it and its highest inhabitants, human beings, were stuck in an early and beastly stage of development; the ugly race of humanity was mirrored in the unpleasant fauna of our planet. By stupidly continuing to live within an exploitative capitalist society in which apples were routinely over-priced, men had thrown planet Earth out of its intended orbit, meaning its aromal fluids were not mixing correctly with those of its other planetary suitors. Because Earth happened to occupy an absolutely central position in the Universe, our sexual sickness had also begun to spread out to other worlds, too, like an interplanetary AIDS virus. Earth's spermal aromas were becoming noxious, which had led to the death of the Moon, and given the Sun a "slow fever or consumption", as could be diagnosed by the increasing appearance of sun spots.

While a "rescue column" of some 102 slutty planets was on its way to our Solar

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A 19th century photograph of the Northern Lights, which would, Fourier suggested, eventually heat up and lead to a benign form of global warming.

System hoping to save us from sexual destruction, it had set out on its "forced march" back in the days of Julius Cæsar and had still not arrived. The only solution was for everyone to start living within phalansteries, as aliens did on other planets, and engaging in copious and varied sex acts with one another. With mankind's correct passional attractions re-established in this erotic workers' paradise, the Earth would shift back towards aromal equilibrium, and our globe's sexual gravity return to normal. Our pale and white-skinned "corpse Moon" would then fly away to the Milky Way and dissolve into blissful nothingness, being replaced by five much fresher, nubile and up-for-it young ones, after which the planets would return to their proper Harmony. Welcomed back to the celestial orgy, all the other planets would quickly gather around Earth again, and start shooting off their aromal fluids all over our grateful sphere like frenzied doggers in a pub car-park.

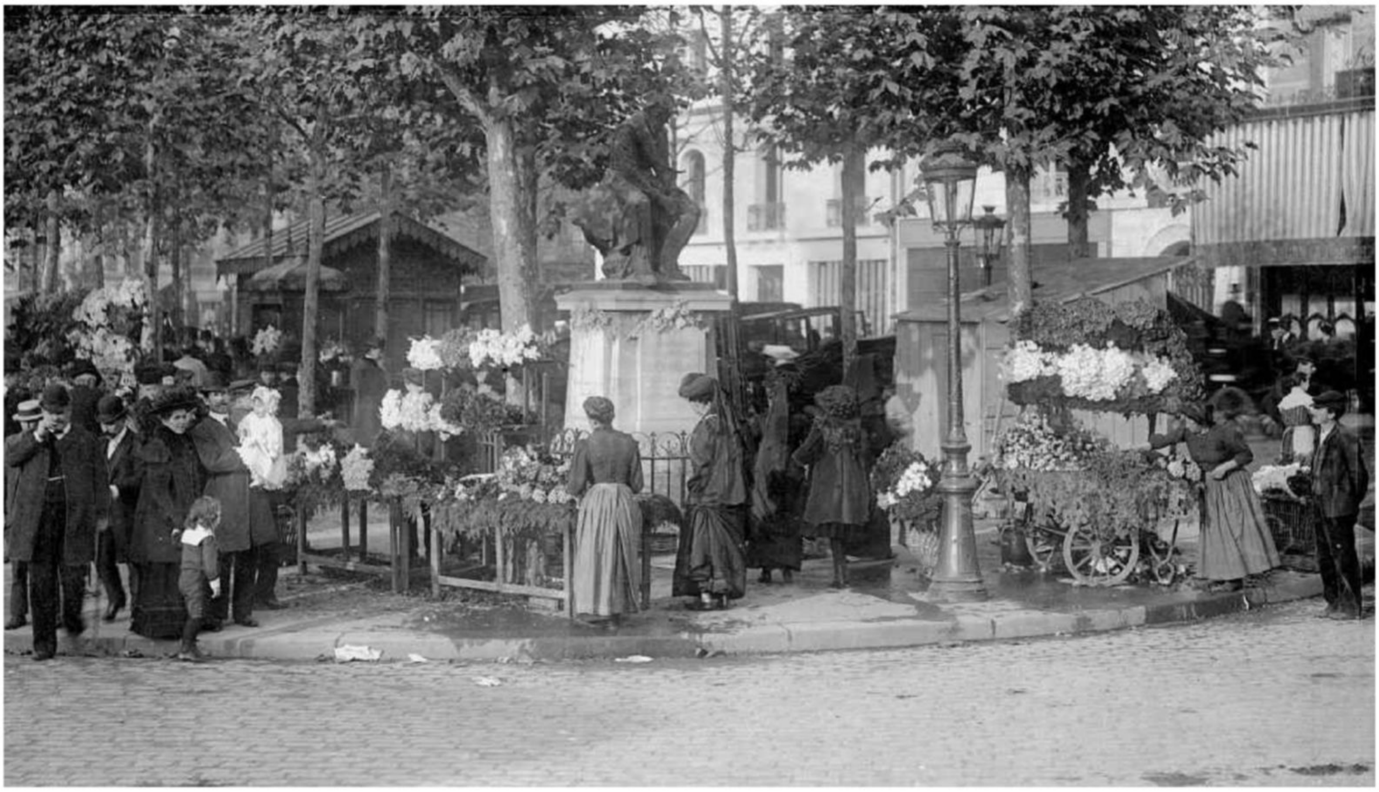
SECRET LEMONADE THINKER

Showered in space-sperm, the scene would be set for the Earth to become an Edenic paradise, with our orb undergoing an all-encompassing planetary orgasm lasting some 80,000 years. The effects of this giant orgasm, Fourier explained, would be extreme indeed. First of all, the *aurora borealis* will begin to change into something called the 'Northern Crown'.

> *"In combination with salt, this liquid will give the sea a flavour of lemonade..."*

Currently, says Fourier, our North Pole is in "violent upheaval with the need to create", but cannot, seeing that the Earth's sexual gravity is all wrong. The present erratic appearance of the *aurora borealis* is a bit like the North Pole prematurely ejaculating dribbles of sperm in sex-starved frustration, he says, this "useless effusion of creative fluid" being unable to join up with the aromas of either the South Pole or other planets. Ultimately, though, as people begin to live in phalansteries and develop Fourier's passional utopia ever further, the *aurora borealis* will become more and more active, recover its potency, and "broaden out into a [permanent] ring or crown" which will emit not only light, as now, but also heat. If you want to visualise this phenomenon, said Fourier, then you should simply think of the rings around Saturn, which are also made of warm, luminous 'aroma'.

This new halo of solidified sperm circling the male North Pole will eventually become so hot that it leads to a kind of benign global warming. Orange groves will flourish in Warsaw, and St Petersburg be transformed into a Mediterranean-style resort along the lines of Nice. Sun-seekers needn't worry about being burned to a crisp, either, as in the future sun tans will make a person as white as semen rather than brown, and thus "the inhabitant of Senegal will be whiter than the Swede". Even better, should you go for a dip whilst holidaying in one of these new Russian Riviera resorts, you will end up swimming not in ordinary sea-water, but in a special kind of fizzy, jizzy, sperm-infused lemonade! And bathers don't need to worry about being eaten by sharks, either, because all the monsters of the deep, once exposed to these new lemonade sex-seas, will either die or undergo a pleasant reform of character. According to Fourier, the warm sperm emitted from the new North Pole will: "change the taste of the sea... In combination with [sea-]salt, this liquid will give the sea a flavour of... lemonade... This breaking down of sea-water... is a necessary preliminary to the development of new sea-creatures, which will provide a host of amphibious servants to pull ships and help in fisheries, replacing the ghastly legions of sea-monsters... Death will strike them all at the same moment!"



LL / ROGER VIOLLET / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The statue of Fourier that once stood on boulevard de Clichy in Paris, photographed in 1900. Erected in 1899, it was removed and melted down following a decree by Marshall Petain, Chief of State of Vichy France, in 1942. On 10 March 1969, the statue, or at least a bronzed plaster replica, reappeared on its plinth, courtesy of the Situationists. It was removed the following day by order of the Prefect of Police and never seen again.

THE AROMA OF URANUS

Furthermore, the Sun, Fourier claimed, was not really a big ball of fire at all. It was an ordinary planet, with humanoid inhabitants termed Solarians, surrounded by a big bubble of aromal love-light of the same kind which formed the rings of Saturn, and which might prove so erotic to other planets that it could well cause strange new worlds to invade its orbit in search of easy action.

According to Fourier, our current Solar System (or 'vortex') was severely underpopulated due to the Earth's rotten sperm, resembling nothing but "the fleeing remnants of a regiment destroyed in battle." Many other vortexes had between 400 and 500 planets, suns and moons within them, he said, "all equipped with rings, crowns, polar caps and other ornaments" which jazzed up the appearance of the night-sky no end. However, Fourier proposed that one day a giant spherical comet the size of Jupiter might enter into our vortex, become aroused by the Sun's aromas, enter into its orbit, pass through puberty and become a fully-grown planetary concubine.

At this point the huge comet's own sexual gravity would kick in, causing a besotted Earth to leave its current orbit and become "one of the moons of the intruder", together with a similarly adoring Venus and Mars. Bathed in sperm from the Sun and its newly-captured planetary moons, this young cometary "vice-sun", as Fourier termed it, would "soon become the richest and most fertile planet in the whole vortex", growing twin double-rings of orgasmic joy around its equator, or double-crowns at both its poles, due to the constant aromal orgy in which it would be engaged. With our own solar system given a dose of cosmic Viagra in this way, all the other solar systems would soon follow suit, due to our position as the "pivotal hinge" of the entire "sidereal apple", with thick jets (or '*fusées*') of planetary sperm criss-crossing the eternal blackness "like bullets on a field of battle".

Human beings will gain a wonderful new feature, a sort of fifth limb or tail

This cosmic orgy would then disprove the greatest slander which mainstream astronomers had ever put out against the planets: namely that they were "lazy", spending their lives "promenading up and down" in their orbits through the night-sky "like our idle gentry". In fact, the planets were anything but idle, having no greater pleasure than to emit their aromas down onto each other, thereby creating new plants, animals and minerals. According to Fourier, the planets engaged in giant interstellar masturbatory contests with one another lasting for some 600 years, "a struggle of ambition [and] self-love, in which each displays its ability in competition". In times past, planets had gushed their sperm down onto our Earth to see what wonders they could seed there. Then, says Fourier, they gathered around and judged the results of their onanistic labours. During one bout of sperm-based combat, for instance, Saturn had accidentally created fleas, which meant it "had to undergo censure" from its disappointed planetary friends – *nul points*, evidently.

The planets would find life "very irksome" without these contests, without which the Universe would be almost lifeless. Through close study, Fourier managed to determine that the elephant, oak and diamond were masturbatory children of the Sun; the horse, lily and ruby offspring of Saturn; cows, jonquils, and topazes kin of Jupiter; and dogs, violets and opals called the Earth their parent. In one unfinished manuscript, Fourier explains how he was able to determine the parentage of these interplanetary creations so precisely.

Apparently, every planet or star has its own unique 'dominant aroma', which corresponds to its basic character or personality. Whilst this aroma mixes with the aromas of other planets and stars to create life, it is nonetheless possible to detect, in any animal, plant or mineral, which celestial body's dominant aroma prevails in the space-sperm which combined to make it up – just so long as you have a well-trained nose for the task. So, for example, you can sniff flowers and work out which planet's dominant sperm they most remind you of. According to Fourier, jonquils smell of Jupiter, violets smell of Earth, and roses smell like Mercury. Once it reaches true maturity, like a fine wine, the quality of a planet's aromal creations will improve; however, any aromas from a mature and healthy planet, mixing with Earth's own currently unhealthy and immature ones, will only produce freakish creatures like snakes or spiders, or worthless minerals like basalt, which are no use to anyone. Consequently, says Fourier, Earth's precious metals and jewels are running out, with diamond and gold mines rapidly becoming exhausted. Most of Fourier's contemporaries ate with only wooden spoons; come the Age of Harmony, the planets would shower Earth with the spermy seeds of precious metals, meaning everyone, not only the rich, would one day sup from silver ones.

At this point, human beings too would evolve, gaining a wonderful new feature termed the *archibras*, a sort of fifth limb or tail. According to Fourier: "The Harmonian Arm or *archibras* is a veritable tail, a tail of immense length and with 144 vertebræ… [It] terminates with a very small elongated hand, a hand as strong as the claws of an eagle or a crab… When a man is swimming, the *archibras* will help him move as fast as a fish. It can stretch to the bottom of the water, carrying his fish-nets… With its help a man can reach a branch 12ft [3.7m] high… pick fruit at the very top of the tree and put it in a basket… It serves as a whip… It can be used to tame a wild horse; the rider can tie up the horse's legs… in the playing of musical instruments it doubles a person's manual faculties." Yes, in Fourier's thinking, one day *all* of us will have a fifth limb.

FRANCK SCURTI

LEFT: Since 2001, the absent Charles Fourier has been replaced by a sculpture by Franck Scurti, 'The Fourth Apple', recalling the piece of overpriced Parisian fruit that set Fourier on the road to his theory of passional attraction.

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

Furthermore, other planets' aromas, mixing with Earth's rejuvenated Harmonic ones, will lead to the seeding of brand-new mineral substances in the ground. Chief amongst them will be certain "paste-matters of new creation" from which we will be able to create a fresh form of glass for use in powerful telescopes. In a chapter of his book *The Passions of the Human Soul*, dealing with what he terms the "POSITIVE UNITARY EYE, OR TRANSPARENTIAL DIAPHANIC VISION, CO-IGNEOUS, HOMOGENOUS WITH FIRE", Fourier explains how, come the Harmonic Age, human eyes will evolve the amazing power of "diaphanic vision", allowing us to see through flames and peer straight into the Sun, where we will be able to see people waving back at us. When combined with the new super-glass in tomorrow's telescopes and microscopes, our new fire-piercing eyes will also become capable of X-ray vision whenever an object is illuminated by the Sun or flames. So, beam sunlight or fire onto a person's stomach, then examine it beneath a super-microscope and you can see what ails their organs, or, during pregnancy, deduce what gender the baby is.

Meanwhile, the crystalline shell of solidified space-sperm, which Fourier says will ultimately surround all properly evolved planets and stars, can also be used as a kind of mirror or "celestial magic lantern" by the super-eyed Harmonians of tomorrow. By aiming telescopes up at the most polished bits of the sperm-mirror, you will be able to see the reflection of things taking place miles away below on Earth, such as fleets setting sail from distant harbours, or people having sex in bushes. Sailors could then be equipped with giant wheels on which the letters of the alphabet would be written; by spinning them, they could identify themselves or request provisions. The only problem Fourier could see with this scheme was that some fans of sex in bushes might object to being spied upon, but he countered that, come the Harmonian Age, "morals will no longer be the same"; with everyone shagging in the shrubbery, it wouldn't really matter.

Remarkably, it also turns out that our present unevolved eyes are "subversive" in nature, and have cunningly tricked us into thinking that the moons, stars and planets are "twenty [or] thirty times farther off than they really are", something Fourier tries to prove by claiming that if the celestial bodies are really as far apart as we currently think, then their sperm would surely go stale in transit and "lose all its intensity, as happens with wine too long in bottle" and thus rendering it useless by the time it achieved splash-down.

Planets apparently use their sperm to send each other telegraphic messages requesting emergency supplies of tasty aromal fluid to feed off. If they were really as far apart as today's idiotic astronomers claim, then these sperm-starved planets would simply die of hunger, Fourier says. Thus, when we get our new super-eyes and super-telescopes, we will find to our surprise that the planets are much nearer than we thought, allowing us to view them and their inhabitants closely. "We shall see their fields, their animals, plants, buildings and individual movements as distinctly as we see [people] from our windows", says Fourier; even "the dwarfs inhabiting Juno" will appear crystal-clear. Our much more Harmonic and sexually-liberated alien neighbours have already been spying on us through their own super-telescopes for years and laughing at our primitive ways; they were particularly amused by the Battle of Austerlitz, apparently.

I wonder, however, what precisely the aliens made of poor old Charles Fourier, squinting up at them strangely through the dark night sky? We may hope they would at the very least have taken the time to give him a quick little wave of the *archibras.*

An FT regular, SD TUCKER is the author of such fortean books as Space Oddities, Forgotten Science, Great British Eccentrics, The Hidden Folk, Terror of the Tokoloshe *and* Paranormal Merseyside. *He is currently working on* False Economies, *a book about strange economic ideas, as well as future titles about quack doctors and ghosts with a sense of humour.*

space oddities
our strange attempts to explain the universe
S. D. Tucker

***Space Oddities: Strange Attempts to Explain the Universe* by SD Tucker is out now from Amberley, priced £14.99.**
ISBN: 97814456-62626

Whitby: “The Town of a Magic Dream”

The Yorkshire fishing town of Whitby is the location for a new film based on the haunting, supernatural stories of Arthur Machen. **CAROLYN WAUDBY** explores the weird credentials of the town where St Hilda turned serpents to stone and Dracula first arrived in England...

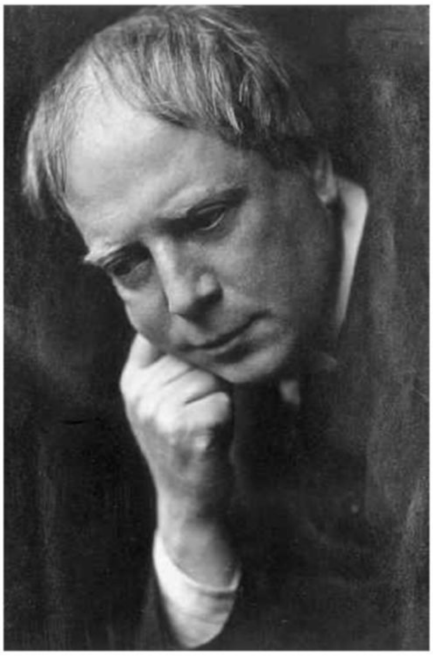
The northern fishing town of Whitby has in recent decades become famous – or infamous – for its Goth Weekends. Large-scale cultural events, held at Hallowe’en and Easter, they attract thousands of visitors, celebrating gothic and alternative culture through music, film, and especially costume. Figures in top hats, black Victorian crinolines, or sexed-up Hammer horror-style vampire garb can be seen strolling Whitby’s cobbled streets or climbing the 199 steps to its ruined clifftop abbey and church.

Whitby Goth Weekend was founded in 1994, and built on one of the town’s great claims to fame: that Count Dracula himself sailed into the harbour aboard the *Demeter* in Bram Stoker’s famous novel of 1897 (see ‘Bram Stoker in Whitby’ on p42). But Whitby’s outré credentials extend far beyond the well-known vampire and were already established long before Stoker took up lodgings and penned his seminal bestseller. In fact, they stretch back millennia, to some of the earliest land and sea creatures. Add to the mix slaughter, shipwrecks, and a lucrative Victorian industry associated with death itself and Whitby has more than its fair share of weirdness.

FOSSILS AND WHALES

Whitby’s coast is Jurassic. Its cliffs are embedded with ammonites and the skeletons of giant marine dinosaurs, exposed to the light and modern eyes for the first time due to the constant nibbling and thrashing of North Sea waves on its soft shale and sandstone.

Equally old and mysterious is jet, for which Whitby has become renowned. This type of brown coal – formed from the fossilised wood of a tree similar to the present day Araucaria or Monkey Puzzle, washed into the sea and rivers and crushed by detritus – has been used as a jewel and talisman for over 4,000 years. The ancient Greeks and Romans named it Gagates, after Gages, a town and river in south-western Turkey. They believed it had both magical and curative powers, and could, for example, ward off serpents. Jet was, and still is, found washed up on Whitby’s beaches and its residents became skilled in carving and polishing it into jewellery. A booming fashion industry was spawned when Queen Victoria adopted it on the death of her consort Prince Albert (see ‘Jet and Death’ on p40).



LEFT: Arthur Machen. **FACING PAGE:** Visitors to Whitby Goth Weekend descend the 199 steps from the ruined clifftop abbey to the town.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

> *Machen was instantly struck by Whitby’s aura of the supernatural*

Prior to this, Whitby, with its location on England’s north-eastern coast, had become a major port in the bloody and dangerous trade of whaling. In 1753, several local merchants formed the Whitby Whaling Company and set off from the town’s harbour to Greenland. Between then and 1833 there were 55 whaling ships operating out of Whitby, and it is thought that the town’s whaling industry was responsible for the harvest of over 25,000 seals, 55 polar bears and 2,761 whales. Great boiler houses were built alongside the harbour to render the whale blubber into oil. Although whaling offered local men employment, many boats were lost to angry waves or crushed by ice, their crews going down with them.

THE HAPPY CHILDREN

The Welsh supernatural writer and journalist Arthur Machen visited the town in November 1916 when he was despatched by the *London Evening News* to pen features on life on the Home Front – in particular to cover the resurgence of the town’s jet industry as the growing number of war dead created an expanding market for funeral jewellery. As a literary visitor, he followed in the footsteps not just of Stoker but also Lewis Carroll.

Carroll first stayed for a week in 1854 with a group of students studying mathematics before attending Oxford University. In later life, he returned several times with his family, lodging at what is now La Rosa Hotel on the West Cliff – a location used in the new Machen films. Carroll was bewitched by the town, and scholars are pretty certain it helped fuel his wildly imaginative *Alice* tales.

Machen too was instantly struck by Whitby’s unique aura of the strange and supernatural. Having arrived by train, he stayed at the Angel Inn, a few hundred yards from the station. From here, he took evening strolls along the town’s cobbled streets and up and down its steep, narrow alleyways to the clifftops, where he looked

OLI SCARFF / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

down on the fishermen's houses with their uneven rows of red roofs.

The wartime blackout meant there was very little light, and Machen describes a full moon shining on the Abbey walls, the water and the "rocking boats", making him feel as if he had entered an "ancient city of enchantment". Further on in that same article of 14 November – "Wonderful Whitby in the Moonlight" – he writes: "It has been said that when one looks out over the country at night one sees in fact a mediæval landscape; and so I shall always hold that I saw at Whitby that night a mediæval city."

Whitby inspired him to go beyond the journalistic assignment that had brought him there, and to pen a short story – *The Happy Children*. The tale is a mixture of fact and fiction based on Machen's stay in the town, which he renames Banwick. Its central character is, like Machen, a journalist from London who arrives in the evening by train. He walks from the station and describes the scene that greets him: "… when I stood on the quay there was the most amazing confusion of red-tiled roofs that I have ever seen, and the great grey Norman church high on the bare hill above them; and below them the boats swinging in the swaying tide, and the water burning in the fires of the sunset. It was the town of a magic dream."

The Happy Children, which like most of Machen's wartime output is a mixture of ghostly atmosphere, religious mysticism and subtle propaganda, takes place on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, celebrated on 28 December each year to commemorate the children massacred by Herod and traditionally regarded as the first Christian martyrs. In the religious ceremony, the children of a community are gathered in their local church to receive a blessing; but in Machen's tale the children are out playing in the dark streets late into the night, their unnatural singing echoing along the town's narrow alleyways. They are dressed all in white, while some are dripping in seaweed and others sport horrific, bloody wounds as they wind their way up to the steps to the Abbey church. In his article "In The Footsteps of Arthur Machen",[1] Simon Clark puts forward the idea that Machen's 'happy children' were apparitions of the many children killed when the *Lusitania* was torpedoed by the Germans the year before.

JET AND DEATH

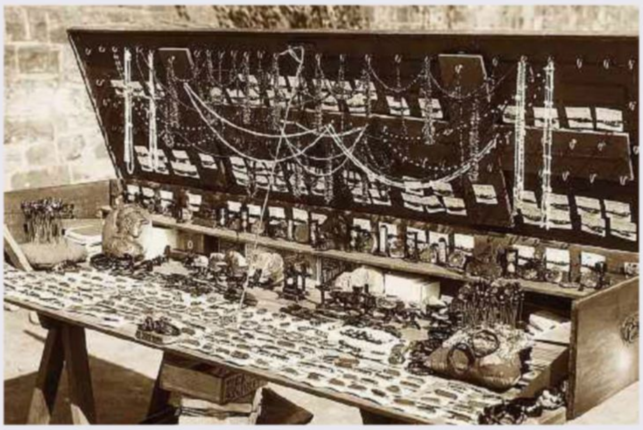
References in literature show that jet was well known throughout the Elizabethan period, and in the 18th century crude beads and crosses were fashioned in Whitby. The rapid burgeoning of the industry during the Victorian age has been attributed to a number of factors.

The introduction of the lathe in 1800 is believed to have been the spark, followed by the opening of the first railway line to Whitby in 1836. This created a new market, as jet was sold to the influx of tourists as gifts and souvenirs, with many items featuring images of the town's iconic St Hilda's Abbey.

As women's fashions changed to voluminous crinoline skirts and heavy clothing, jewellery had to become larger – and jet was the perfect gem to wear as it was so lightweight. And when jet was shown in the Great Exhibition of 1851, it led to Royal patronage – famously from Queen Victoria, but it was also worn by the Queen of Bavaria and the Empress of France.

The real turning point came at the death of Prince Albert in 1861. Victoria adopted jet as jewellery of mourning and specified that it was the only adornment allowed to be worn at court. Victoria's subjects followed court fashion, and since infant mortality was so high, many women wore black for most of their lives. By 1872, there were 200 jet shops in Whitby employing 1,500 men.

But jet's success was also its downfall. On the death of Queen Victoria, a new Edwardian era of elegance and light emerged which had no stomach for jet and its associations with death. The change in fashion sent the industry into the doldrums for decades. Again, it was the arrival of death, and on a colossal scale, that revived it: the outbreak of the Great War.



BELOW: A 19th century Whitby jet stall; a mourning necklace; a pendant with the face of Medusa.

KGPA LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

On his 1916 visit to Whitby, Machen tracked down a traditional jet worker called Mr Trattles, who was turning a lathe with his feet. Mr Trattles showed the journalist Victorian bracelets of "the old school" which Machen found "appalling".

He wrote in *The Evening News*: "They were like mourning coach horses. They were composed of gross jet tablets two inches deep." Trattles also showed him a bracelet that took a prize at the Great Exhibition – deeply carved with flint and flowers and "exquisite skill" – but admitted that "no-one would wear it now".

However, Machen described how the jet workers were busy once more. "Not so busy as in the golden [eighteen] 'fifties, 'sixties, seventies; but still doing comfortably and working hard, and finding a ready market for their work. They are making mourning brooches, bracelets, ornaments of all kinds for those who have lost relatives in the war."

FRANK MEADOW SUTCLIFFE / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: An atmospheric view of Whitby in 1890, with the Abbey looming above the harbour. **OPPOSITE AND BELOW:** Stills from the portmanteau film *Holy Terrors*.

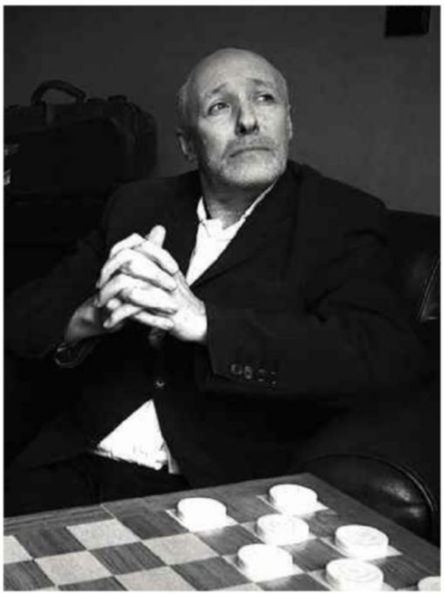
FILMING MACHEN

The Happy Children is one of six Machen tales filmed for the first time by Julian Butler and University of Bradford academic Mark Goodall. [2] While Whitby itself was the obvious choice for the filming of *The Happy Children*, Goodall decided it would be equally perfect for the other Arthur Machen stories he has adapted for the screen – *The Cosy Room, The White Powder, The Ritual, The Bowmen* and *Midsummer* – a package that pays homage to the portmanteau films of the 1970s under the overall title of *Holy Terrors* (itself taken from a collection of Machen tales published just before the author's death in 1947).

Goodall chose these stories for their "mysterious atmosphere that would translate well into film". Apart from a BBC production of *The Shining Pyramid,* he believes there have been no small screen versions of Machen's writings – unlike the numerous television adaptations of M R James's ghost stories, of which Goodall was a big fan. "The atmosphere was really strong. They would film them in rural locations and desolate landscapes. It wasn't an urban form of terror, it was really genteel," he explains. "They wouldn't show a lot. They used suggestion to create atmosphere and they stayed in your head longer."

The *Holy Terrors* films are all shot in black and white, bar *Midsummer*, which Goodall says "seemed to require the colour and mood of a summer night".

Filming took place at Whitby locations like La Rosa Hotel and the Black Horse pub



Filming took place at La Rosa Hotel and other actual Whitby locations such as the Black Horse pub and the White Horse and Griffin Hotel and Restaurant. The latter two premises stand on cobbled Church Street, which leads to the Abbey Steps. Both buildings are said to be haunted, and the White Horse and Griffin boasts Charles Dickens among its illustrious former guests.

The fact that Whitby hasn't changed much over time enhances its strange characteristics, Goodall believes. "You do feel as if you're going back to a different age."

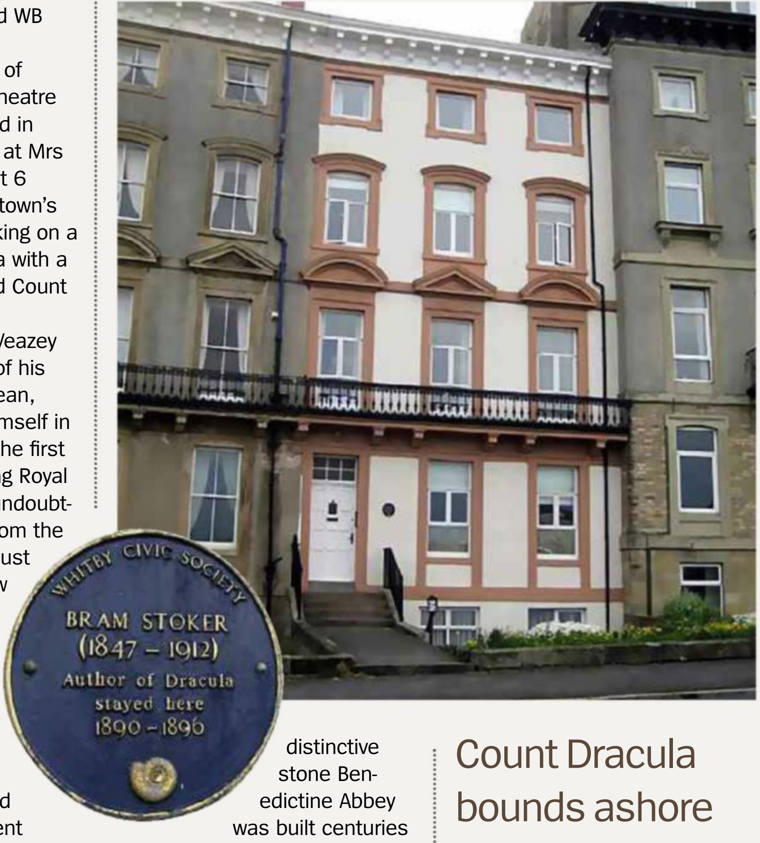
WHITBY FOLKLORE

A Whitby resident of 10 years, Mark Goodall believes part of the town's palpable feel of the supernatural arises from the fact it has retained much of its traditional rituals and folklore. "Some aspects of folklore are strange and disturbing when you look back at them," he observes.

The town museum displays one of the few remaining examples of a Hand of Glory – the severed right hand of a hanged criminal used as a talisman. [3] Whitby's Hand of Glory was found behind the lintel of a door in a cottage in Castleton, in the parish of Danby, North Yorkshire. It was accepted that the hand, which had been meticulously 'prepared', was a talisman which could guarantee the success of burglars. According to a pamphlet written by Cecilia Hunter and Paul Pearson, the last recorded instance of this sort of charm being used for a break-in

DRACULA COMES ASHORE: STOKER IN WHITBY

Bram Stoker was born in what is now known as Fairview in Ireland in 1847. As a small child he suffered debilitating illness and was nourished with stories from Irish folklore which helped shape his febrile imagination. His own heritage on his mother's side included the lurid incident of a Sheriff hanging his own son.



LEFT: Bram Stoker. **BELOW:** Six Royal Crescent, where Stoker began work on the story that became *Dracula* in 1890, and the plaque marking his stay.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

After studying mathematics at Trinity College, Dublin, he took up writing. It was while penning reviews that he befriended actor Henry Irving and went on to become the business manager of Irving's Lyceum Theatre in London. Stoker's literary and theatrical connections were further strengthened when he married Oscar Wilde's former beau Florence Balcombe and mingled with authors preoccupied with the supernatural, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and WB Yeats.

After a gruelling tour of Scotland with Irving's theatre company, Stoker arrived in Whitby in 1890 to stay at Mrs Veazey's guesthouse at 6 Royal Crescent on the town's West Cliff. He was working on a new story set in Austria with a central character called Count Wampyr.

Every morning, Mrs Veazey would turn Stoker out of his rooms so she could clean, and he would install himself in the Reading Room on the first floor in the neighbouring Royal Hotel to write. Stoker undoubtedly drew inspiration from the locale of Whitby itself, just as Machen would a few years later. The West Cliff looks straight out at St Mary's Norman church and the ruins of the Abbey of St Hilda perched on the cliff on the opposite side of the harbour, and these become prominent locations in *Dracula*.

The Abbey has a rich history. Abbess Hilda founded a double monastery of both monks and nuns at Whitby (Streoneshall) in AD 657 which was to become a centre of learning and the arts. Hilda's monastery was built of wood and thatch. The towering and distinctive stone Benedictine Abbey was built centuries later and lasted until it was destroyed during the Reformation.

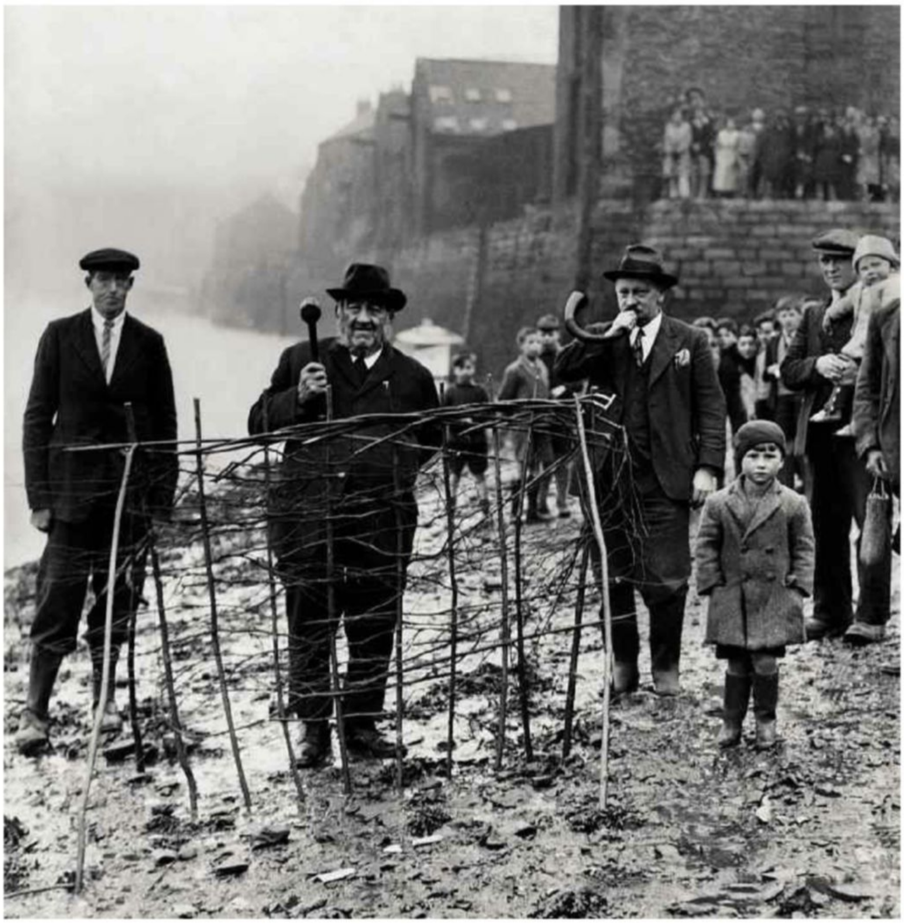
Local folklore recounts that St Hilda eliminated evil snakes and serpents in Whitby by throwing them off the top of the Abbey cliff and that they turned to stone in the heat of her anger. This was a mediæval explanation of the spiral fossil ammonites found in the rocks below the cliffs. Victorian geologists named a local species after her: *Ammonite hildroceras*. Today Whitby's coat of arms depicts three St Hilda's Serpents. It's surely no coincidence that while he was a member of the *Daily Telegraph's* literary staff between 1905 and 1910, Stoker penned a novel called *The Lair of the White Worm*.

Count Dracula bounds ashore at Whitby in the form of a dog

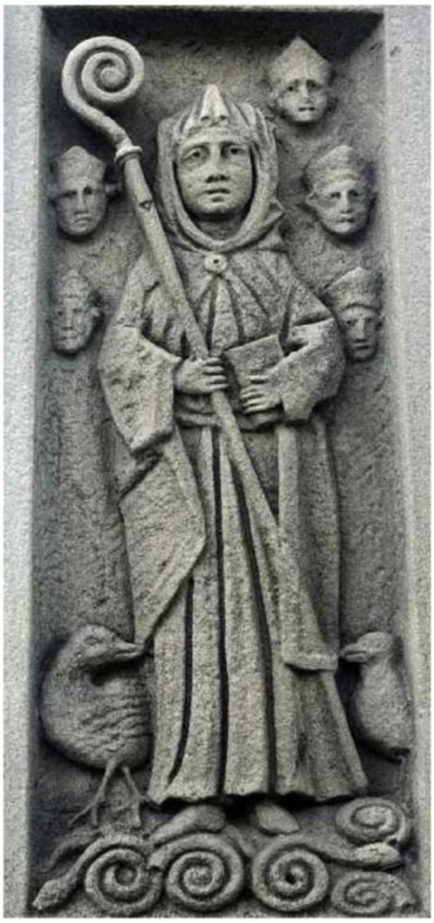
Stoker made use of his 1890 recuperation in Whitby by chatting to fishermen and conducting research into local stories and legends. He visited the library and museum on the Quayside (now Quayside Fish and Chips) where he thumbed through the records of *The Whitby Gazette*. The real-life account of a coffin being blown off its horse-drawn hearse into the sea while crossing the harbour bridge, and the story of a Russian ship wrecked on the beach both became crucial elements in his developing vampire story.

The wrecked ship was called the *Demetrius* and it ran aground because the captain was drunk. Stoker changed the name to the *Demeter* in *Dracula* – thus the ship on which the vampire is transported to England is named after the pagan goddess of fertility. Count Dracula bounds ashore at Whitby in the form of a dog – very likely taken from local legends of a supernatural black dog called Black Shuck. According to Harry Collett, who leads a fascinating Dracula tour of the town, the author had also come across stories from Germany of comatose plague sufferers being buried alive and trying to scratch their way out of coffins.

Dracula was originally called *The Undead* and was published in 1897 (see **FT257:34-41**). The story, which has spawned countless adaptations, remains a vital part of Whitby's appeal, and the town holds an annual Bram Stoker Film Festival over the Hallowe'en weekend.



TRINITY MIRROR / MIRRORPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

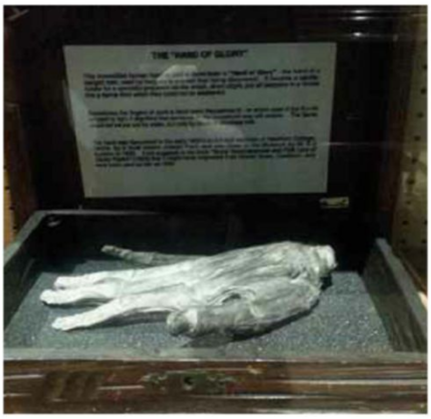


ABOVE LEFT: The annual ceremony of planting the Penny Hedge, which dates back over 800 years, seen here being carried out in 1935.
ABOVE RIGHT: St Hilda, with serpent-like ammonites at her feet: they were traditionally believed to be the snakes she had cast from the cliffs and turned to stone.
BELOW: Whitby Museum's Hand of Glory – the severed right hand of a hanged criminal, possibly taken from a gibbet on the moors above Castleton.

was 1850 at Baysdale Abbey. The power of the hand was said to come from the fact it had been ritually prepared and had been cut from the limb of a man hanging from the gibbet. In North Yorkshire, the criminal had to be a hanged murderer, but lesser criminals were deemed acceptable in other parts of the country. A gibbet once stood on the moors above Castleton and could be the provenance of the Whitby hand.

Then there is the mediæval custom of the annual building of the 'Penny Hedge', believed to date back to 1159.[4] It takes place on the Eve of Ascension each year at a small, muddy beach known as Boyes Staith on the east side of Whitby harbour. It is said to stem from an incident in which three noblemen chased and killed a boar in front of the altar of a hermit in his cell. When the hermit protested, he was badly injured and later died in the Abbey hospital. He forgave the huntsmen, but the Abbot's court brought them to trial and found them guilty on two charges.

A penance was laid upon them and their heirs. At sunrise on Ascension Eve they were to cut stakes with a knife and carry them on their backs to the town at low tide. Then they were ordered to set them at the edge of the water so that they could withstand three tides. If they or their descendants refused, they would surrender their land to the abbot. The hedge has never fallen and continues to be built today to resist the strongest tides.



And for Goodall it is the sea that is perhaps the most enduring and perhaps the most magical aspect of the old fishing town. "The North Sea is very uncompromising. *The Happy Children* begins and ends with the sea. The cameraman just filmed it and I thought it was great."

ABOUT THE FILM

Holy Terrors was launched at the National Science and Media Museum, Bradford and has screened at a number of film festivals. There will also be a screening of the films in Sheffield during October as part of the Off The Shelf Festival, with an introduction by Mark Goodall and Dave Clarke. For further information and details of future screenings visit: facebook.com/HolyTerrorsFilm/. A DVD, with a facsimile of *The Town of a Magic Dream* booklet edited by Richard Dalby, can be purchased from holyterrors@btinternet.com.

NOTES

1 *In The Town of A Magic Dream: Arthur Machen in Whitby* published by Mark Valentine in 1987.

2 See Cecilia M Hunter & Paul D Pearson, 'The Hand of Glory: The Story of a Thieves Talisman', *Whitby Archives Local History Series 17*; Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, 'The Hand of Glory', *Museum and Library Research Paper No 1*.

3 See Homer Sykes, *Once A Year: Some Traditional British Customs*, Gordon Fraser, London, 1977.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

CAROLYN WAUDBY is a journalist, lecturer and poet and a frequent visitor to Whitby. She has a strong interest in folklore, the supernatural and travel and has previously contributed to the Fortean Traveller section.

Robert Boyle and the Invisible College

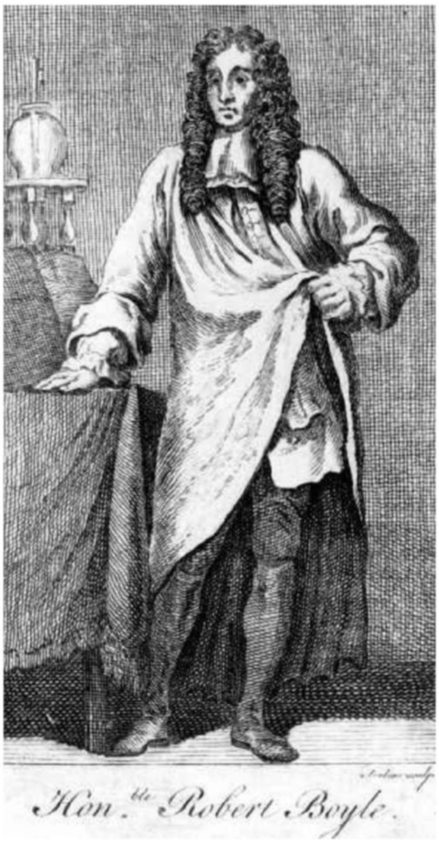
BOB RICKARD explores the connected world of Britain's 17th century proto-forteans in the era before the Royal Society turned its back on the study of strange phenomena.

As I began researching a number of British cases from the 16th and 17th century suggestive of levitations and teleportations (for an upcoming FT article), I became increasingly aware that they shared something. They were connected, not necessarily through the manifested phenomena, but through the network of people that reported and commented upon them.

The group of people that concerns us here centred upon, primarily, Robert Boyle, Lord Orrery, Henry More, Joseph Glanvill, John Aubrey, and Richard Baxter – but also included Robert Hooke, Isaac Newton, John Evelyn, Christopher Wren, John Locke, Robert Plot, Sir Kenelm Digby, Samuel Pepys and others – all of them involved (one way or another) in the establishment of the Royal Society in the early 1660s, or as contributing members. [1]

When the Royal Society was eventually established with two charters, in 1662 and 1663 [2] – many of its members were also earnest Puritans who saw themselves as a bulwark against a growing atheism. While Boyle was ready to believe with Glanvill that there were such entities as "witches and apparitions", he advised caution, acknowledging in his essay *Reason and Religion* (1675) that most accounts were "false and occasioned by the credulity or imposture of men".

The principal members of the Invisible College, indeed, shared an interest in accounts of anomalous phenomena as they manifested in the context of contemporary myth, local superstition, folk medicine, apparitions and poltergeists, witches and fairies. This did not mean they all believed uncritically in every fantastic account – they represented a range of opinions – but they did agree that some evidence of a truth or fact should be sought if, indeed, it existed. For example, Glanvill argued that the legal proceedings against witches provided sufficient reason to accept the existence of spirits and the machinations of the Devil; and Boyle, a keen alchemist, reasoned from scriptural grounds, that angels were attracted to the Philosophers' Stone, and if provable it "would be an instance of the incorporeal being affected by the corporeal". This search for demonstrable evidence was at the heart of the establishment of the English school of Natural Philosophy.



Hon.ble Robert Boyle.

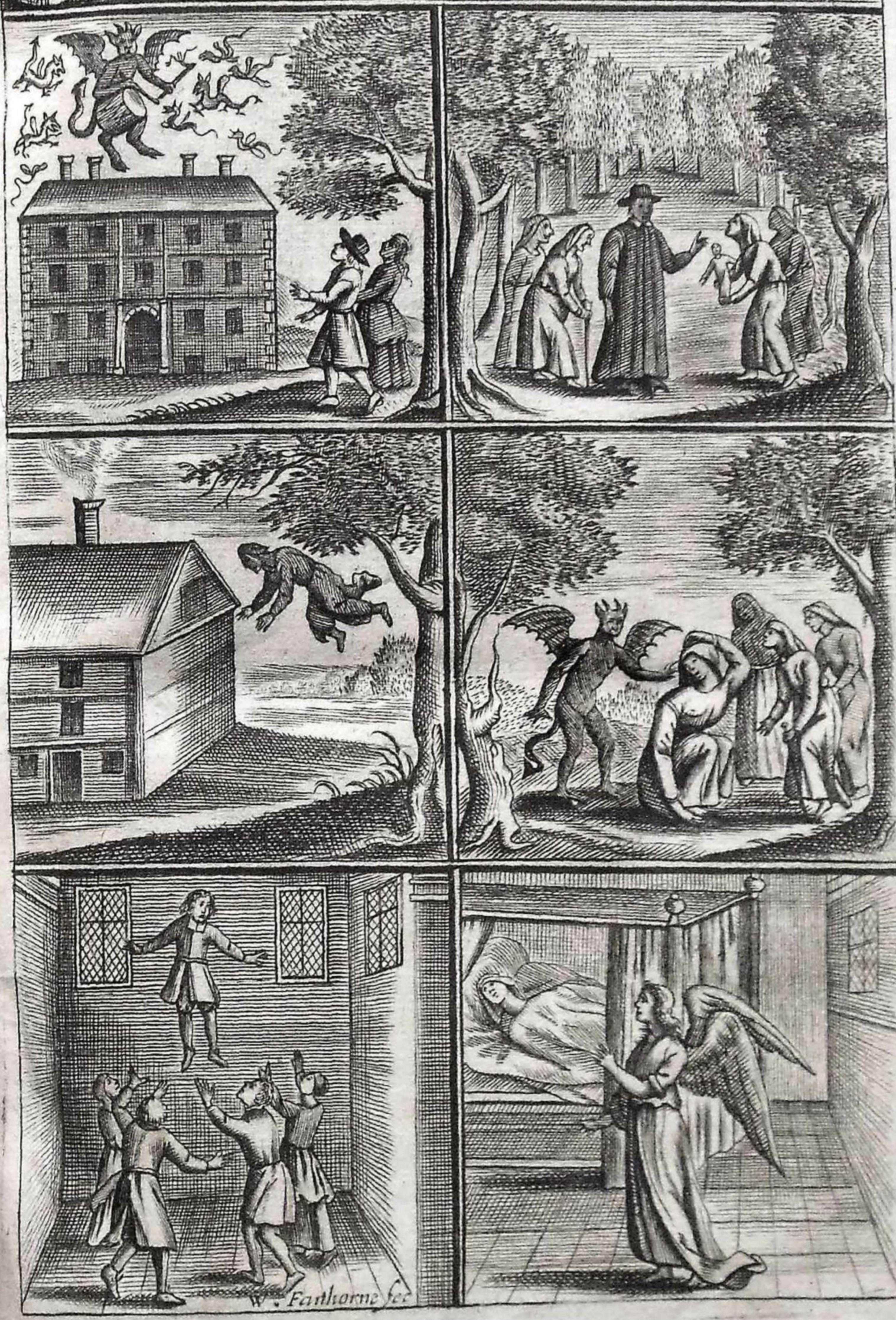
HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Robert Boyle. **FACING PAGE:** The famous frontispiece of Joseph Glanvill's book on witchcraft and apparitions, *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, published posthumously in 1681 and edited by Henry More.

Samuel Pepys's diary contains a passage on rains of amphibians

Robert Boyle and his brother Roger (Lord Orrery) were Anglo-Irish nobility; Robert was a physicist and founder of modern chemistry, while Roger was described as having a serious and contemplative disposition. Hooke was an architect and prodigious inventor of physical and optical devices who, after the Great Fire of 1666, made surveys of damaged London for Sir Christopher Wren. He was one of the powers behind the scenes at the Royal Society and became the second editor of *Philosophical Transactions*, the world's first truly scientific journal.

Evelyn, Pepys and Aubrey were diarists and collectors of cultural ephemera (Pepys's diary, for example, includes a passage on rains of amphibians). Henry More was one of England's leading Platonist philosophers at Cambridge University; 'natural philosophy' being the ancestor of modern science. Baxter and Glanvill were Protestant 'divines' who had (at different times) been chaplain to the King, and both wrote historically important books: Baxter's *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* (1691), and Glanvill's famous *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (the 1681 edition of which was edited by Henry More). But it was Robert Boyle who was the main hub of 'progress' in those early days, having used his wealth and resources to employ Hooke (to make equipment for his experiments) and, at the other extreme, funding the first translation of the Bible into Gaelic, made by the ill-fated minister Robert Kirk, author of *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691), whose later disappearance was blamed upon the fairies (see **FT61:29**).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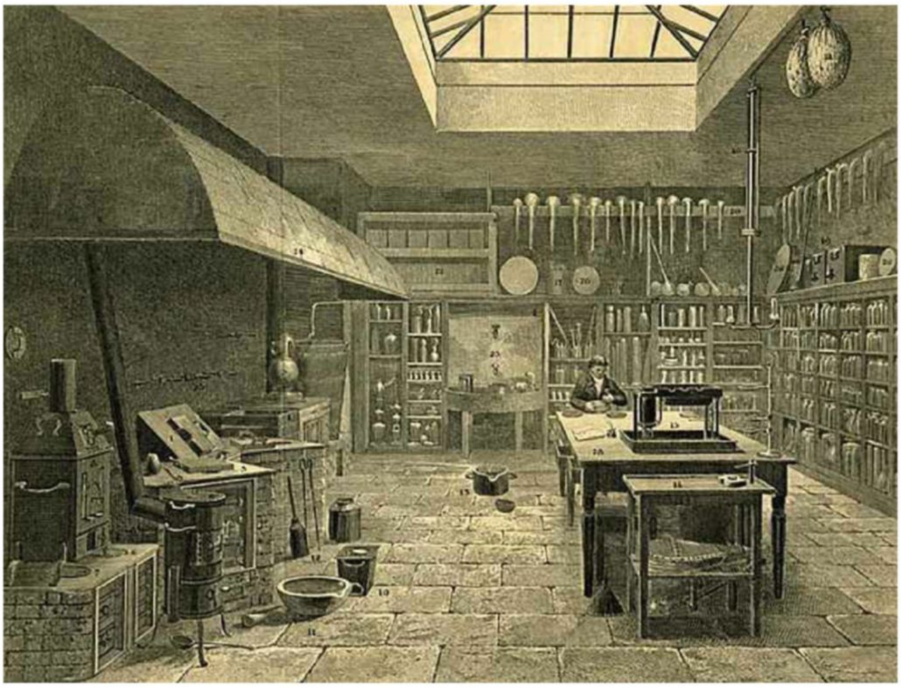
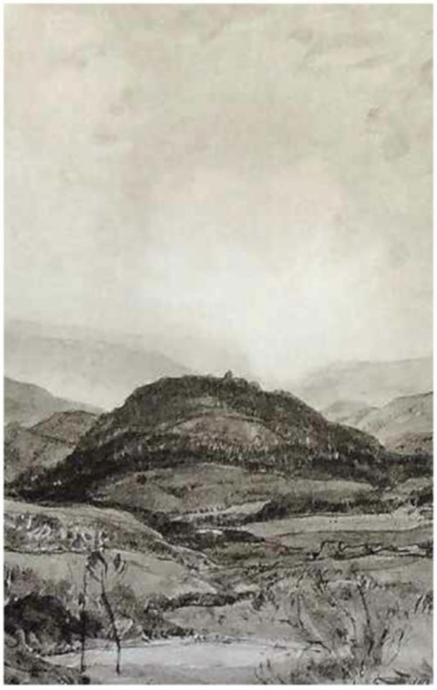




ABOVE LEFT: A 17th century alchemist's laboratory such as Boyle might have used. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The 'Fairy Hill' in Aberfoyle where Robert Kirk's body was found in 1692. **BELOW:** The title page of Glanvill's *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, concerning the existence of, and evidence for, "witches and apparitions".

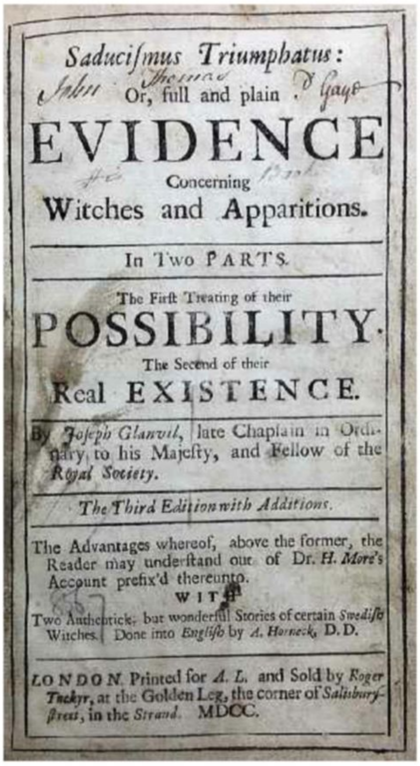
NULLIUS IN VERBA

An example of their proto-fortean interests concerned the legendary 'weapon salve' of Arthurian romance. The idea was that treating the weapon that caused the injury could heal the wound, no matter the distance between them. This salve – sometimes said to be an ointment or a powder – also occupied the intellects of Paracelsus, Della Porta, Bacon, Fludd, and, later, Van Helmont. Sir Kenelm Digby – a naval commander and diplomat who, like many notables at that time, experimented with alchemy, and was a tutor to Boyle at some point – claimed to have discovered the 'sympathetic powder' version of it. Boyle and colleagues were keenly interested in this substance as a practical example of sympathetic 'action at a distance' and thought it eminently suitable to testing and experimentation.

Despite their somewhat different backgrounds, they shared a delight in, and a sincere curiosity about, the secrets of nature and how they can be rendered accessible to pragmatic investigation (according to Baconian science). From this they advocated a rational, natural philosophical science that did not rely upon religion for its authority. It was Robert Hooke who coined the Royal Society's motto *Nullius In Verba* ("Take nobody's word for it", surely a watchword for us forteans). The engine of this progressive approach was the group's lively correspondence network. Each was aware of his colleagues' interests and they forwarded to each other transcripts of interesting cases and supporting references. Also, each of them had his own private networks of 'intelligence' gatherers. It was, truly, the Internet of its day.

In his correspondence (around 1646 or 1647), Boyle refers to this network of "intelligencers" as "our invisible college", the purpose of which was to "profit from science". The context of this latter phrase was not one of irresponsible gain, but referred to the spirit of Baconian inquiry: that knowledge should be applied to the wellbeing of mankind. In a letter, Boyle referred to the members as "the corner stone of the invisible, or the philosophical college," adding that they "honour me with their company – men of so capacious and searching spirits, that school-philosophy is but the lowest region of their knowledge."

They shared a curiosity about the secrets of nature and how they can be investigated



Saduciſmus Triumphatus:
John Thomas Or, full and plain Gaye
EVIDENCE
his Concerning Book
Witches and Apparitions.

In Two PARTS.

The Firſt Treating of their
POSSIBILITY.
The Second of their
Real EXISTENCE.

By *Joſeph Glanvil*, late Chaplain in Ordinary to his Majeſty, and Fellow of the *Royal Society*.

The Third Edition with Additions.

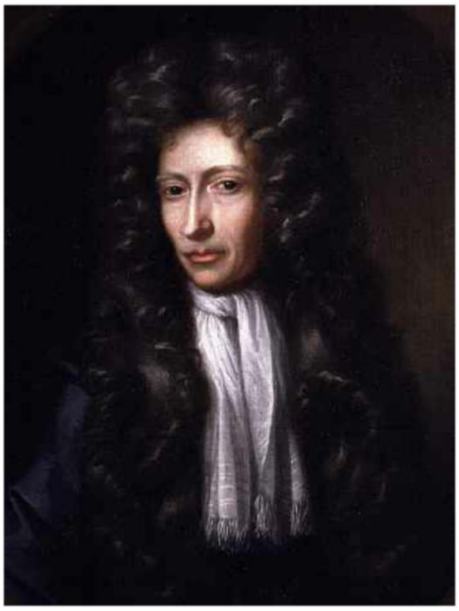
The Advantages whereof, above the former, the Reader may underſtand out of Dr. *H. More's* Account prefix'd thereunto.
WITH
Two Authentick, but wonderful Stories of certain *Swediſh* Witches. Done into *Engliſh* by *A. Horneck*, D.D.

LONDON, Printed for *A. L.* and Sold by *Roger Tuckyr*, at the Golden Leg, the corner of *Salisbury-ſtreet*, in the *Strand*. MDCC.

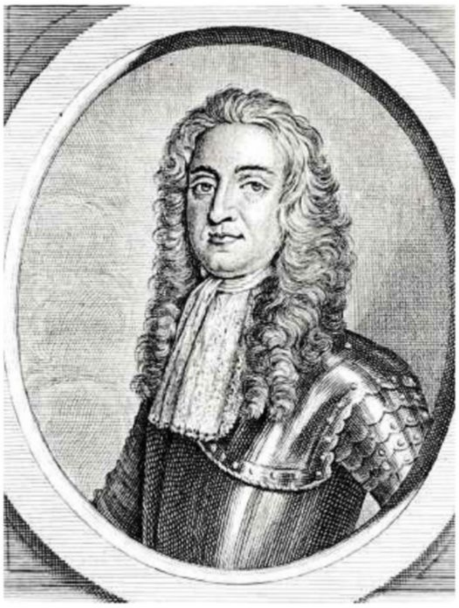
Some of you may recognise the phrase 'Invisible College' from the title of Jacques Vallée's 1975 commentary upon the UFO phenomenon and its history (see Jenny Randles's UFO Files column on p25). Sadly, Vallée's tip of the hat to Boyle and colleagues – on behalf of the pre-Internet network of corresponding ufologists and scientists working beyond the ken of orthodox scientists – is missing from the wiki entry for 'The Invisible College'.

Vallée is a bit more expansive in his *The Heart of the Internet*: "… it should be possible to build electronic communities of experts, invisible colleges of kindred spirits…"; and "I like the idea of using groupware to facilitate new types of 'grapevines' forcing old organisations to evolve. Informal networks and 'invisible colleges' have always been the real harbour of trust and the spring of action for societies". [3] Vallée again pays tribute in *Wonders in the Sky* (with Chris Aubeck), in describing the background to 17th century interest in aerial anomalies:

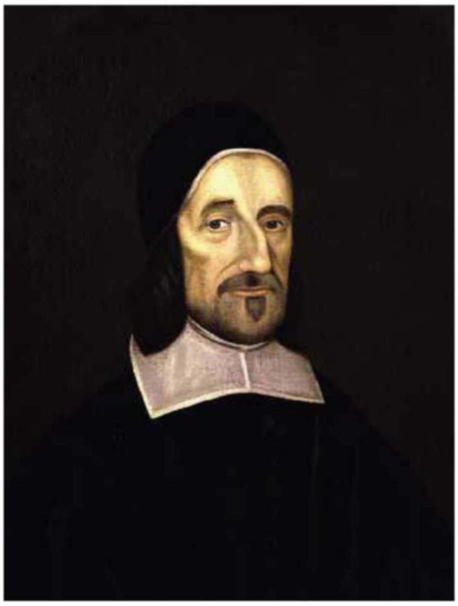
"Spurred on by strategic and scientific interest in navigation, astronomy underwent unprecedented growth during the 17th century. Experimental



Robert Boyle (1627-1691)

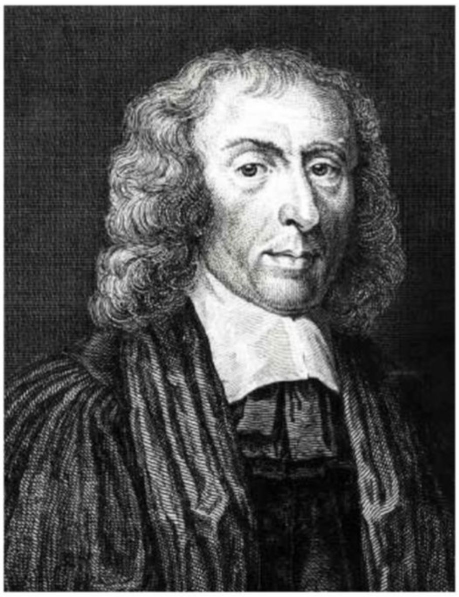


Roger Boyle, First Earl of Orrery (1621-1679)

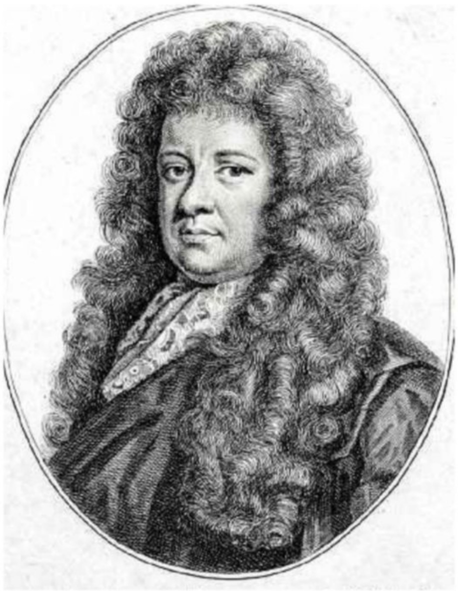


Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

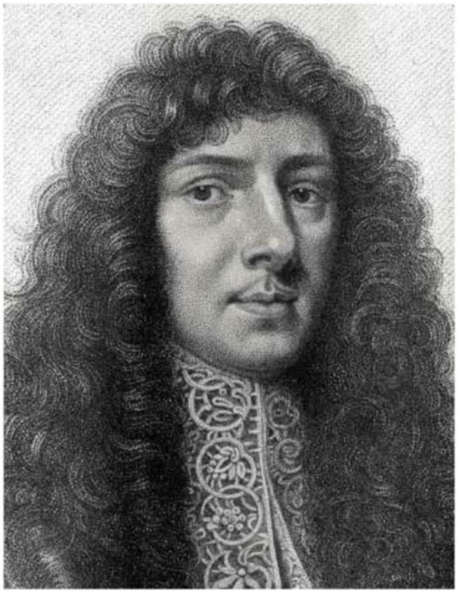
ROGER BOYLE: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



Henry More (1614-1687)

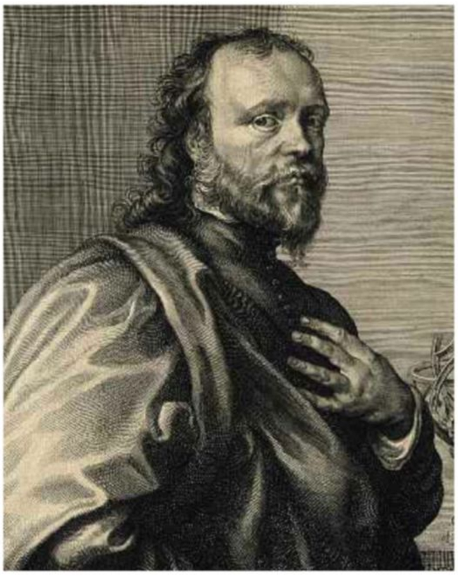


Samuel Pepys (1633-1703)

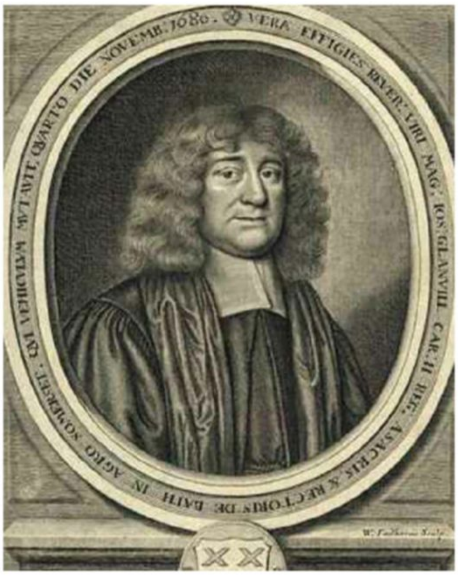


John Aubrey (1626-1697)

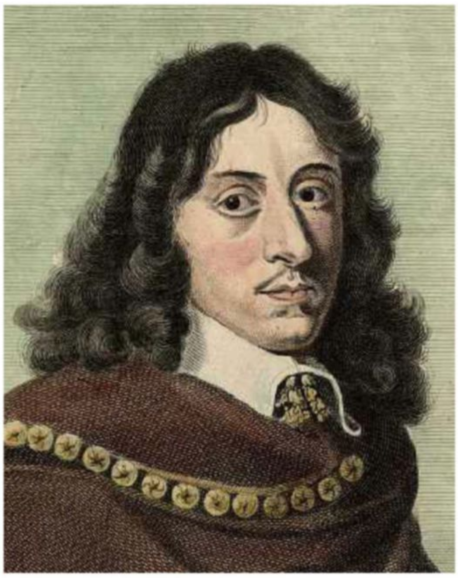
MORE, PEPYS, AUBREY: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-1665)


VERA EFFIGIES REVER. VIRI MAG. IOS. GLANVILL CAR. II REG. A SACRIS & RECTORIS DE BATH IN AGRO SOMERSET. QUI VITAM MUTAVIT QUARTO DIE NOVEMB. 1680.
W. Faithorne Sculp.

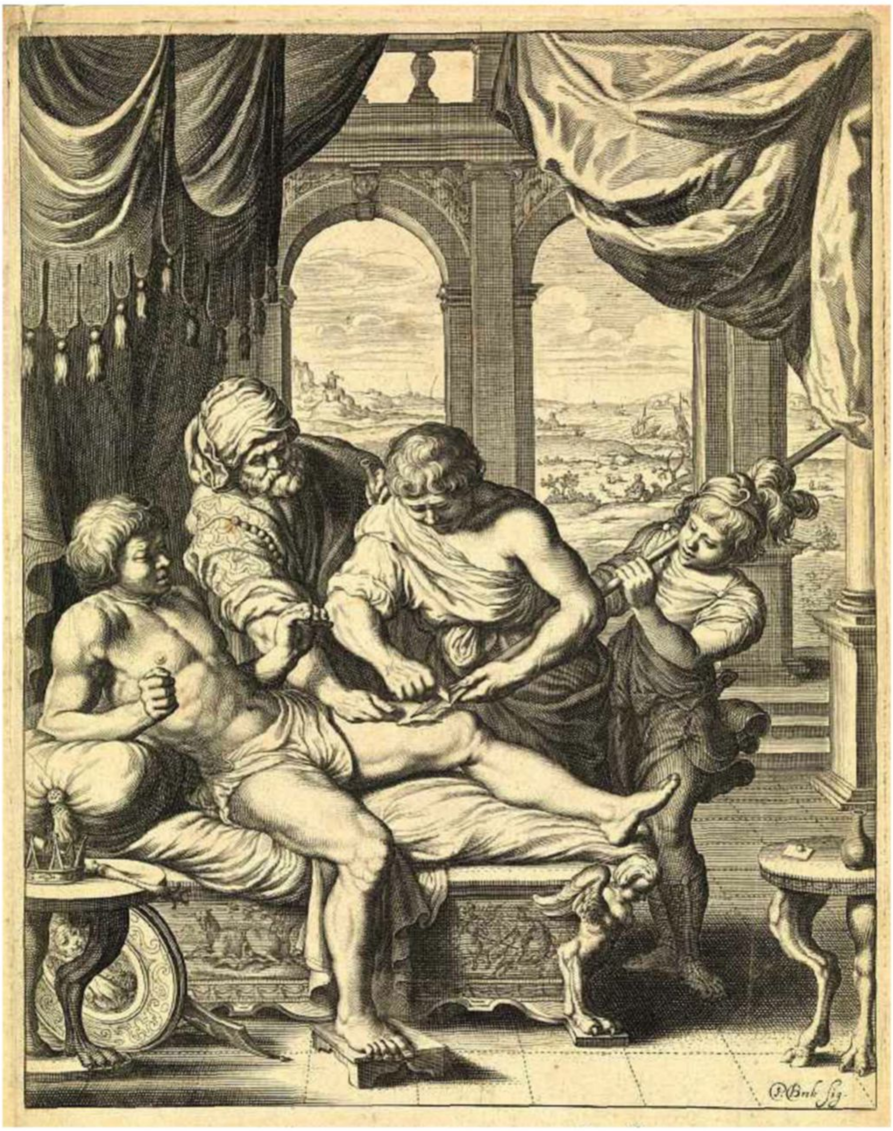
Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680)



John Evelyn (1620-1706)

GLANVILL: ART PHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

EVELYN: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



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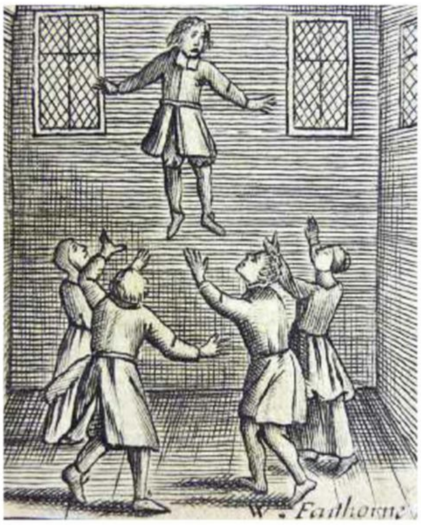
ABOVE: Telephus, the son of Hercules, is cured of a potentially fatal wound with some rust from Achilles's spear, with which he had originally been wounded. The search for such a 'weapon salve' was of great interest to Boyle and his associates.

and theoretical publications flourished under the pens of Galileo, Huygens, Cassini, and numerous observers of the Moon and planets using the newly-invented telescopes. Similar progress revolutionised physics, mathematics and medicine, often in spite of the dictates of the Church… This movement towards better understanding of nature and man's relationship to it, long repressed by religious ideology, found its expression in the 'Invisible College' and culminated in the creation of the Royal Society in London in 1660, while Harvard College in the colony of Massachusetts was awarded its charter in 1650… News of extraordinary phenomena was greeted with keen interest, either for their 'philosophical' value or as omens of mystical importance. Antiquarians and Chroniclers collected such reports and compiled information from various countries, including North and South America. We even begin to find reports of unusual aerial sightings in the pages of the early scientific journals, like the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, often in terms that seem surprisingly open and free compared to the staid, self-censored, dogmatic, and often arrogant scientific literature of today." [4]

Why did the Royal Society abandon the investigation of the paranormal?

However, it is not quite true, as some have it, that the Invisible College itself transformed into the Institution of the Royal Society. There were several other groups of progressive proto-scientists interested in 'inductive proofs' that were based in Gresham College, London, where the birth of the Royal Society provided a common focus; these included Samuel Hartlib's Agency and the Philosophical Society of Oxford (Oxford Philosophical Club). Also, there were similar networks of correspondents on continental Europe and in the USA, sometimes referred to as the 'Republic of Letters' [5] – and there is no doubt that the British, Scottish and Irish pioneers were aware of them, in touch with them, and inspired by them.

BELOW: Lord Orrery, Henry More and others were given an account of a well-observed case of apparent levitation.



MARGINALISING ANOMALIES

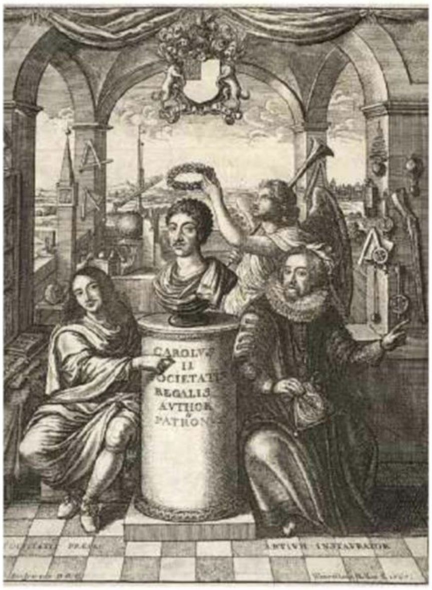
Given the gravity with which the Royal Society is regarded today as a 'gatekeeper' for scientific excellence, it is rather ironic that its early members were inspired by the thought of escaping religious authoritarianism, only to create a vehicle for its successor, the scientific establishment. Charles Fort commented upon this particular passing of the 'dominant' baton. But what if their development had gone another way? What kind of science would we have today if the Royal Society had decided to take anomalous phenomena seriously as, at one point, it was poised to do? Would it have been the "more inclusive" science that Fort championed?

The question has been approached in a different way: why did the Royal Society, after such "a promising start with an illustrious set of forebears", abandon the investigation of the paranormal and lurch in the direction of "a godless scientific materialism"? In his fascinating paper on the Royal Society and the decline of magic,[6] Michael Hunter (Boyle's biographer) provides a number of detailed explanations. Certainly, under the pragmatic editorship of first Henry Oldenburg and then Robert Hooke, *Philosophical Transactions* steadily became the public showcase of triumphant scientific successes, as well as demonstrating how science should be done. In this, it was clear that astronomy, physics, chemistry and medicine provided advances that could be replicated; where the same could not be said of the more vague, variable and intransigent subjects that attracted the more mystical members of the Invisible College.

Despite the zealous tones of several modern accounts of the history of the Royal Society, which claim that the Society actively challenged and destroyed superstitions and errors, “this was precisely what did not happen” according to Hunter. Nor was there a corporate policy of sidelining or downplaying witchcraft and similar subjects. These topics, Hunter notes, were nearly always the private interests of individuals, not of the Society itself. Nevertheless, there was a generally unstated restraint or silence on these matters. After the ‘Glorious Revolution’ the religious milieu gave way to the Industrial Revolution, and the philosophy behind the attack on atheism lost its wind. Where Glanvill’s quest for proof against the enemies of Christianity fizzled out, it was Boyle’s brand of scientific adventuring that proved the more durable.

In fact, the Royal Society found far more traction in keeping religion (and the phenomena habitually associated with it) at arm’s length. Articles on ‘anomalous’ topics in the *Transactions* – although few to begin with – were quietly marginalised or turned down; books by members on witchcraft and other forms of supernaturalism were denied an *imprimatur*; and correspondence on such subjects frequently went unanswered. In time, science was the dominant; subscriptions from the likes of Cotton Mather dropped away and Baxter’s accusation that the Royal Society was now an atheist organisation fell on deaf ears.

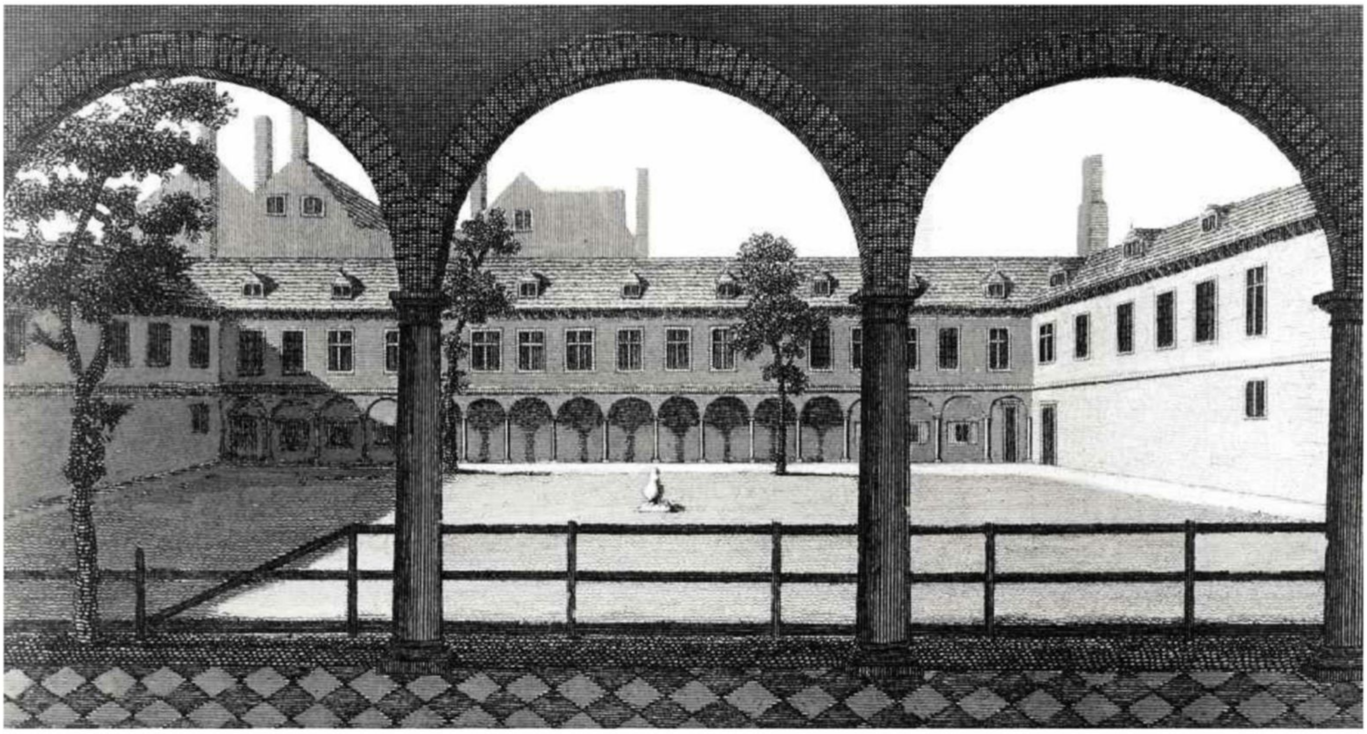
Commenting upon all this in connection with a well-observed case of levitation – one that was told to Lord Orrery, Henry More and some others, which I will detail another time – the folklorist Andrew Lang, in his *Cock Lane and Common-Sense*,[7] thought that the significant new attitude that followed the Civil War and Restoration of the English monarchy was “to scoff at witchcraft, to deny its existence”. The ‘last stand’ of the English intellectuals “against the drollery of Sadducism” [8] (as Glanvill had it), failed in the arena of science but took root on the fringes of religion and philosophy. Lang sees “the psychical researchers within the English Church, like Glanvill and Henry More,” or beyond its pale, “like Richard Baxter and many Scotch divines”, as laying the groundwork for the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). By defending witchcraft and apparitions “as outworks of faith”, they removed them from the miraculous to the sphere of abnormal phenomena where, here too, discovery and theorising no longer required a belief in the Devil. Where “the old inquirers saw witchcraft and demoniacal possession… the moderns see hysterics and hypnotic conditions”.



One of the consequences of the ‘dumbing down’ of the powers of evil, Lang thought, “was to remove from stories, like the ones… of interest to us, any mention of the more ancient (yet still thriving) common belief in the powers of fairies and witches”. This point brings me back to the wonder that was Robert Boyle, the 14th child of Richard Boyle, the first Earl of Cork. The youngest member of the Invisible College’, his inquiring intellect ranged freely over an impressive spectrum of interests, scientific, anomalous and religious (he was said to have read the Koran in both French and Latin translations). By all accounts, he was a 17th century fortean indeed. [9]

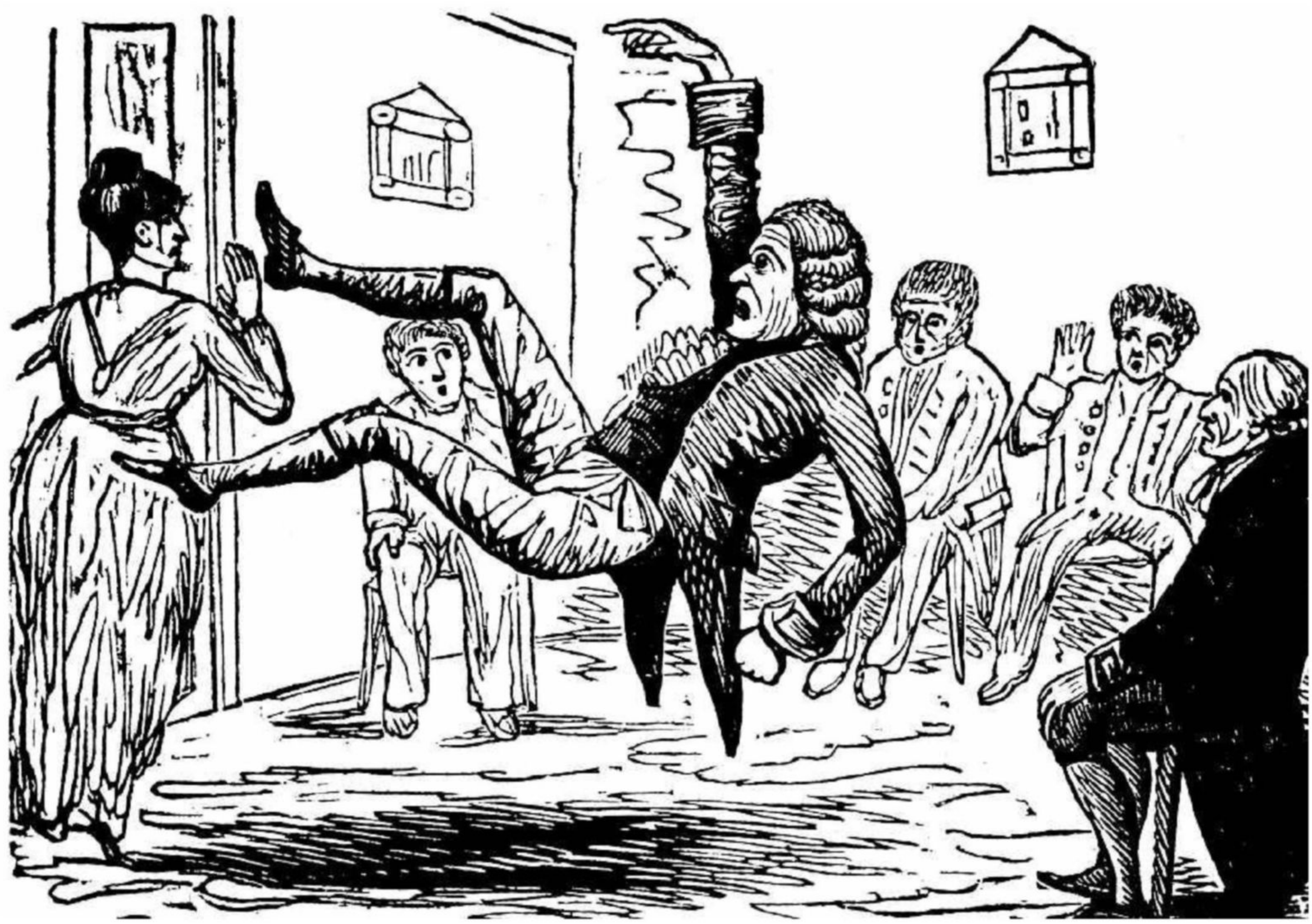
Perhaps it helped, that, in his day, there was no orthodox science against which his inquiries could be judged as unorthodox. Or perhaps – as Peter Costello recently reminded me – it was the way he was brought up; a way that fell out of fashion in its own time too. Peter quoted from Anthony Powell’s edition of Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*: “[Boyle] was nursed by an Irish nurse, after the Irish manner, where they putt the child into a pendulous satchell (instead of a cradle), with a slitt for the child’s head to peep out.”

“There is a hint here,” wrote Peter, “that he was fostered out in the old Gaelic custom,



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

TOP: The frontispiece to Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society of London*, 1667, by Wenceslaus Hollar. **ABOVE:** A view across the courtyard at Gresham College, circa 1700. This was the meeting place of the Royal Society until 1710.


CHRONICLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LEFT: An illustration of the Macon poltergeist episode of 1612, in which Monsieur Perreaud and his family were plagued by a talking poltergeist.

which meant that from his earliest years he was exposed to the Celtic thought patterns of the local people."

That upbringing – in which a consideration of the 'supernatural' preceded (and therefore outranked) its outright rejection as nonsense – also shaped his brother Roger, the second Earl of Orrery, to be more receptive to the 'invisible world'.[10] According to Baxter, Orrery – who was instrumental in bringing the Irish healer Greatrakes to England – had, for many years, employed as his chamber servant the son of a French pastor whose house in the Burgundy town of Macon, in 1612, was the epicentre of a much-publicised talking poltergeist haunting. Both Boyle and Orrery knew Monsieur Perreaud and his son for a long time and discussed the case with these eyewitnesses. They remained steadfast in their belief in the case; so much so that Boyle himself paid for the French account to be translated into English as *The Devill of Mascon* in 1658.[11]

NOTES

1 For most of my citations and facts about the Royal Society and Robert Boyle, I have used Wiki articles on specific topics; Richard Evans's blog 'The Invisible College (1645-1658)' at : https://technicaleducationmatters.org/2010/12/12/the-invisible-college-1645-1658/; and Michael Hunter's numerous articles and volumes on Boyle's life, work and publications, particularly *Boyle: Between God and Science* (2010), and his anthology *Robert Boyle Reconsidered* (1994).

2 The main candidate for who got the ball rolling is Benjamin Worsley. "Eight years Boyle's senior, [Worsley] was evidently the initiator of the 'Invisible College'". He is described as "the friend and colleague [who] introduced Boyle to the pleasures and usefulness of natural philosophy." John Henry, 'Boyle and Cosmical Qualities' in Hunter, *Robert Boyle Reconsidered*, p127.

3 Jacques Vallée, *The Heart of the Internet* (2003), pp43, 118.

4 Chris Aubeck and Jacques Vallée, *Wonders in the Sky* (2016), pp177-178.

5 Republic of Letters: www.wikiwand.com/en/Republic_of_Letters.

6 Michael Hunter, 'The Royal Society and the Decline of Magic' in *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 65, no. 2 (20 June 2011), pp103-119.

7 Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (1912), ch.3. 'Comparative Psychical Research'.

8 "Sadducees" – Against the background of the English Civil War, the Non-Conformists (Protestants and Dissenters) rejected the usages of the older Church of England, in which the Puritan faction was then dominant. Among the elite of Puritan intellectuals, atheists were cast as Sadducees, after the ruling Jewish sect at the time of the Crucifixion who did not believe in the possibility of "the resurrection of the dead, the existence of spirits and the obligation of oral tradition" but emphasised the superiority of the written Laws. The term was used rhetorically to taunt all who doubted that subjective experiences (like seeing ghosts) had any reality.

9 However, I have not yet determined (to my own satisfaction) the interesting claim by Tracy Twyman that Robert Boyle served as the "Grand Master of the Priory of Sion between 1654 and 1691"; see her blog 'Robert Boyle and the Invisible College' at http://quintessentialpublications.com/twyman/?page_id=64.

10 Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the World of Spirits…* (1834), pp6-8. This was originally published by Baxter himself just a few months before he died in 1691, and republished in 1834 together with Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World* (orig. 1702).

11 An interesting paper on the case – 'The Devil Does His Mischief: An Interesting Glimpse into the Huguenot World of Demonology during the Scientific Age' – and Boyle's role in publicising it is by Kristine Wirts, in *The Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, vol. 39 (2011). Permalink: http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0039.005. Wirts, in declaring that the original French account shows "how French Protestant elites made sense of the supernatural during the Scientific Revolution", invites an interesting comparison with the influence of Glanvill's *Sadducismus* upon the English Protestant elites. Curiously, in researching this, I found an old Twitter posting (April 2016) from *FT* regular Theo Paijmans, noting that a first edition of *L'Antidemon de Mascon* had been saved from the fire that razed the Bavarian State Library in 1943.

BOB RICKARD started Fortean Times *in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles and a founder of the Charles Fort Institute.*

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THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

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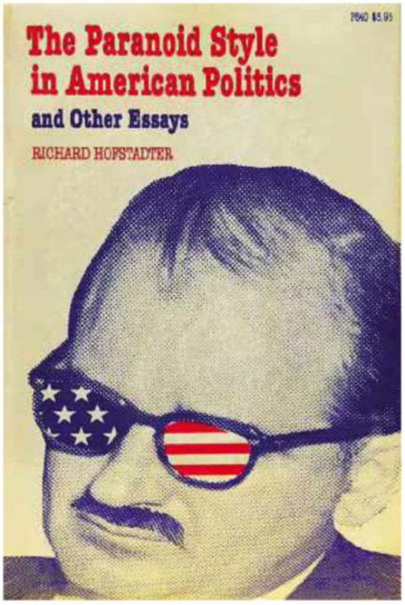
25. HELP! HELP! THE PARANOIDS ARE AFTER ME!

Everyone loves a good conspiracy theory these days, whichever side of belief or disbelief they stand. In that respect conspiracy theories are a little like tales of unicorns and a lot like urban legends. All are fun, straddle the borderline between real and unreal, and can be argued over from many a point of view. (We ourselves have no doubt of the reality of unicorns, as is well known.) What's perhaps slightly less obvious is that while various conspiracy theories have enjoyed popular – if usually, and relatively, brief – acclaim over the centuries, the emergence of a whole cottage industry devoted to seeking out and exposing conspiracies dates back only a little more than half a century, when assumptions and allegations arose that US President John F Kennedy's assassination was the concerted work of various villainous parties, and not of 'lone gunman' Lee Harvey Oswald's one-man firing squad. Then came the 'Pentagon Papers', leaked by Daniel Ellsberg to the *New York Times* in 1971, a secret official history that indicated that the US engagement in Vietnam had been based on lies from beginning to end (and top to bottom of the military and political hierarchy). Shortly after that came Watergate and the fall of President Richard Nixon. Over the following decade and a half, the conspiracy industry got itself up and running, Watergate having provided the suspicious with a certainty that the Establishment never told the truth about *anything*. The Kennedy assassination aside, the more baroque and byzantine of conspiracists' conclusions were circulated among the faithful in newsletters, self-published books, and small-circulation magazines. With the advent of the Internet, conspiracists were able to present their rare perceptions to anyone who cared to look for them. What's to be made of it all?

Conspiracism is by no means exclusive to America, but the US has of late been singularly prolific in producing proposals that an alternate, really-real reality hides beneath the skin of the world that the powers-that-be wish to ensure we take for granted, and for real, even if not all of us may like some of it much. Richard Hofstadter, a professor of history at Columbia University, New York, was the first (or if not, the most influential) to observe, in the mid-Sixties, that conspiracist thinking was endemic to American political life and stretched back to the late 18th century at least. In itself this isn't wholly surprising, given the distrust of overweening government, and by extension wariness of other powerful interests, that is built into the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Conspiracism seems to be the inevitable concomitant vice of these American virtues.



Hofstadter first published *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* in *Harper's Magazine* in November 1964, and a more expansive treatment followed in a 1965 book of essays. At various periods, the usual suspects had been accused of plotting to subvert and subjugate America: the Illuminati of Bavaria (who had actually disbanded by 1787 but carried the can for the French Revolution), the Pope and his wicked Jesuit cohorts, the Austro-Hungarians who, Samuel Morse (of telegraph-code fame) feared in 1835 might soon install a scion of the House of Hapsburg as Emperor of the United States, 'international bankers' (always code for Jews, although Henry 'Model T' Ford was more direct) and, from the mid 20th century, communists, whose major promoter was the junior senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy. Hofstadter observed that while rejected by the mainstream, the conspiracist right infiltrated and turned the Republican Party, which ultimately failed to impress American voters and resulted in Barry Goldwater's massive defeat in the US Presidential election of 1964. This was paradoxically considered a victory by the extreme right (cf. the hard-left Momentum after the 2017 UK General Election).

Interestingly, Hofstadter doesn't mention the growing doubts about the Kennedy assassination, or right-wing doubts about Kennedy himself, but he does have insights into the conspiracist mindset that remain true today. In the mid 20th century there was a shift of emphasis in alleged conspiracies that has never gone away: "…the modern right wing… feels dispossessed: America has been largely taken away from them and their kind, though they are determined to try to repossess it and to prevent the final destructive act of subversion. The old American virtues have already been eaten away by cosmopolitans and intellectuals… the old national security and independence have been destroyed by treasonous plots, having as their most powerful agents not merely outsiders and foreigners as of old but major statesmen who are at the very centers of American power. Their predecessors had discovered conspiracies; the modern radical right finds conspiracy to be betrayal from on high." Among those denounced were President Eisenhower ("a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy") and John Foster Dulles – who to the world at large looked as much like a hardline leftist as the Red Queen with a hangover. As Hofastadter says, wryly, "the real mystery, for one who reads the primary works of paranoid scholarship, is not how the United States has been brought to its present dangerous position but how it has managed to survive at all.”

Hofstadter saw too how “the higher paranoid scholarship is nothing if not coherent… It is nothing if not scholarly in technique… The entire right-wing movement of our time is a parade of experts, study groups, monographs, footnotes, and bibliographies.” So it remains today: although, as others have observed, conspiracists have a habit of citing each other (Holocaust deniers are especially adept at this), thus providing an impenetrable bubble of self-referring self-confirmation. Or as Hofstadter put it: “The paranoid’s interpretation of history is distinctly personal: decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequences of someone’s will.” The unstated corollary is whoever exposes a wicked plot and its wilful perpetrator(s) is, by implication, a hero defeating world-threatening dragons. This has a price, Hofstadter considers: “We are all sufferers from history, but the paranoid [conspiracist] is a double sufferer, since he is afflicted not only by the real world, with the rest of us, but by his fantasies as well.”

A key insight is this: “The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of conspiracy in apocalyptic terms – he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values.” This remains a fundamental characteristic of today’s conspiracists. Whether they see the world’s affairs as ‘actually’ orchestrated by ‘the Jews’, or Gramscian soldiers of a furtive Marxist ‘long march through the institutions’, or shape-shifting alien reptiles, or the Illuminati in charge of realising the New World Order – hardly an exhaustive list of culprits – the notion of an imminent apocalyptic end to civilisation-as-we-know-it is always implicit and very often explicit. This was one theme picked up by Professor Michael Barkun in another groundbreaking analysis, *A Culture of Conspiracy*.

Apocalyptic thinking permeates current conspiracist thought. For example: indigenous European populations are being *deliberately* replaced by foreigners, particularly Muslims; by mid-century we shall all suffer under *Sharia* law. Rather mysteriously, given their generally less than cordial relations with their fellow Abrahamists over the centuries, the Jews often stand accused of this plot when it’s not the scheming of the New World Order. More to the point, Barkun observes that not all apocalyptic or millennialist movements have incorporated conspiracist elements, while conspiracism includes millennialism in its thinking not as a bushy-tailed anticipation of a florescence of the good and the true but because it is essentially Manichean. There are good guys and bad guys, and nothing in between – and the bad guys may win.

> “GO, MY BOOK, AND HELP DESTROY THE WORLD AS IT IS.”
>
> *Russell Banks*

This will happen in part because nothing officially stated can be believed – “nothing is what it seems” – and the unenlightened majority, who believe the official story, will be suckered into a diabolic system of governance. We ourselves note at this point that the distrust of the *demos,* so often adduced by conspiracists as an adjunct to the machinations of the powers-that-really-be, is mirrored in their own disdain for the benighted ignorant – that’s us – for all their professions of alerting the inert to the Truth.

Barkun brings some useful new terms to the table. One is *stigmatised knowledge*, which comprises “claims to truth… regarded as verified despite the marginalization of those claims by the institutions that conventionally distinguish between knowledge and error.” Among the subsets of stigmatized knowledge perhaps the most important to conspiracists is *suppressed knowledge*, “claims that are allegedly known to be valid by authoritative institutions but are suppressed because the institutions fear the consequences of public knowledge or have some evil or selfish motive for suppressing or hiding the truth.” Take away the fear and the notion of evil and this sounds much like what fascinates forteans – but then Fort himself, on occasion, was not averse to conspiracist thinking, as we remarked (somewhere) in the *Dictionary of the Damned*. Barkun notes that ‘suppressed knowledge’ “tends to absorb all the others”, and the “consequence is to attribute all forms of knowledge stigmatization to the machinations of a conspiracy.” One upshot of that, given the immensely wide range of such ‘knowledge’, is to make conspiracy theories, especially in their most florid form, unfalsifiable.

Barkun also gives us the useful expression *improvisational millennial style*, which essentially means picking up and adding to the jigsaw any piece of supposed information that will fit the narrative to hand. His prime example is the factitious excitement over the end (it wasn’t) of the ancient Mayan calendar in December 2012, in the service of whose justification all and every manner of alternatively-accurate ‘facts’ were brought to bear (see **FT285:33-47, 300:33-43**). By this time, the millennialist cherry-picking had long since crossed over to conspiracy theorising, and from that omnivorous technique there developed the ‘super-conspiracy’. There were some surprisingly early exponents of this mode of thinking, although it is difficult to know how widespread, or how widely accepted, was their joining of their chosen dots. Between 1976 and 1979, peripatetic preacher John Todd (see **FT307:38-43**) revealed the labyrinthine workings of the Illuminati on Satan’s behalf: such heterogeneous entities as the Rothschilds (of course), the United Nations and the Communist Party were abed and hard at it with the FBI, the ultra-right John Birch Society, and the Knights of Columbus, to mention a few. Todd may have missed the Young Jaycees and the Boy Scouts. As Barkun remarked, Todd’s scheme seemed to have more organisations within it than without. And in 1978, one Stan Deyo hauled UFOs and Alternative 3 into this orgy in a barrel of red herrings. In his scenario, the Illuminati would demoralise the world by engineering all manner of crises from the economy to the environment, and (having discovered anti-gravity propulsion), stage a massive, fake alien landing, then use their flying saucers to leave the Earth, which they now controlled. This set the stage for the crossover conspiracy theories of Bill Cooper, who managed to mix UFO-related shenanigans with survivalist militia politics. (As Barkun explains, the UFO connexion brought political conspiracy theories to a far wider audience than before.) Possibly the most convoluted theory entangling the usual suspects with aliens and UFOs was generated by John Grace, *alias* Val Valerian, in his series of massive *Matrix* volumes published (at no less massive expense to the reader) from the late 1980s. Outdoing even Todd, Grace stirs the Gestapo, the Hellfire Club, the Theosophists and the revolutionary socialist Industrial Workers of the World into his cocktail of evil colluding opposites.

We can’t leave without a mention of David Icke. Barkun provides a public service by tracing the origins in science fiction of Icke’s trope of shape-shifting-alien-reptiles-in-charge, and deals incisively with Icke’s slithery, self-contradictory relations with antisemitism. We’ve said before that conspiracy theories are networks of *found significances.* Hofstadter and Barkun explain how some things are more significant and tempting than others, and what they are. Others have come later to illuminate more brightly why some people so need to be tempted: see next episode.

Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, Alfred Knopf 1965; reprinted, Vintage Books, 2008

Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic visions in contemporary America*, University of California Press 2003; second edition, 2013

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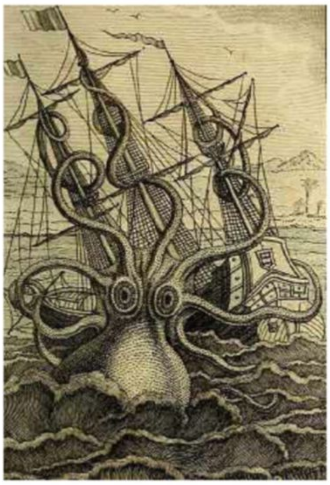
Prophet of the Kraken

RICHARD FREEMAN recounts the career of Pierre Denys de Montfort, whose pioneering research into giant cephalopods saw him ostracised from the scientific mainstream

In 1820 a man died of starvation in a Parisian gutter. He was given a pauper's burial, and the few who attended likely did so only to laugh at the fellow who believed in sea monsters. The man was the French naturalist and malacologist (an expert in molluscs) Pierre Denys de Montfort. He was also a scientific heretic, for he dared to research something that the high priests of science deemed to be an old wives' tale: giant cephalopods. Had he only lived until 1857, he would have seen his 'wild stories' vindicated with the discovery of Arciteuthis, the giant squid. Born in 1764, de Montfort was fascinated by nature from an early age. After service in the army and a stint as assistant to the geologist Barthelemy Faujas de Saint-Fond, he became attached to the Jardin des Plantes, the main botanical garden in Paris. For a time, he was much sought after, being offered places on a number of expeditions and travelling to Egypt and Germany to study geology. His gift for languages did not go unnoticed, and he became attached to the Museum of Natural History as a translator. He narrowly missed receiving the chair in mineralogy.

He wrote an addendum devoted to molluscs for Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon's *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière* – a feather in the young naturalist's cap. During this time, he investigated the origins of ambergris and became interested in the idea of huge cephalopods. He interviewed American whalers who had settled in France about the evidence for such creatures. One man, Ben Johnson, told of a monstrous tentacle found in the mouth of a sperm whale. The tentacle was 35ft (11m) long and had been severed at both ends; de Montfort reckoned another 10-20ft (3-6m) of it had been lost. It was as thick as a mast, with suckers the size of hats. Another man, Reynolds, told of seeing what he thought was a red sea serpent lying next to a whale they had killed. It was found to be a massive, 45ft- (14m) long tentacle. In his *Histoire Naturelle Générale et Particulière des Mollusques*, de Montfort classifies two giant cephalopods, the colossal octopus and the kraken octopus, the sources for the latter probably referring to what we now know as the giant squid. He writes of a votive painting (long since lost) in the chapel of St Thomas in Brittany showing a titanic octopus attacking a ship. It was supposedly painted to commemorate a real event that occurred off the coast of Angola: a giant octopus had attacked the French ship, wrapping its arms about the rigging and causing the vessel to list dangerously. The crew attacked with cutlasses and managed to get the monster to relinquish its hold by hacking off some of the arms. The terrified sailors had prayed to Saint Thomas.



The tentacle was thick as a mast, with suckers the size of hats

Such huge creatures had been mentioned by Louis Marie Joseph O'Hier, Comte de Grandpre, in his *Voyage a la cote occidentale d' Afrique* (1786-1787). The natives told him that a giant octopus known as 'Ambazombi' would often attack their boats and canoes, dragging them to the bottom, and that they believed the monster to be an evil spirit. The name 'Ambazombi' may be linked to Nzambi, the creator god of the Bakongo people of Angola.

Danish captain Jean-Magnus Dens, a former employee of the Gothenburg Company who had retired to Dunkirk, told de Montfort a similar story. He had once been becalmed off the coast of West Africa and took advantage of the situation to scrape barnacles off the sides of the ship, lowering men on ropes for this purpose. As they worked, a huge kraken rose from the water and wrapped its tentacles around two of the men, dragging them under. Another tentacle coiled about a third sailor, who clung to the rigging. His shipmates managed to save him by hacking off the monstrous member, although the unfortunate man later died of shock. Captain Dens informed de Montfort that the severed portion was 25ft (8m) long and the whole tentacle some 35-40ft (11-12m). It tapered to a point and was covered with suckers. Dens believed that if the creature had attached all its arms onto the ship it would have capsized it. Another captain by the name of Anderson told of finding two huge tentacles, still connected by part of the mantle, on some rocks near Bergen, Norway. They were so thick he could barely put his arms about them, and were around 25ft (8m) long.

Delving into maritime disasters, de Montfort concluded that the loss of a number of ships could have been caused by attacks from giant cephalopods. One example was the disappearance of 10 ships in 1782. Six French vessels had been captured in the West Indies by Admiral Rodney during the Battle of the Saintes, and were being taken to port under the escort of four British ships. All 10 vessels vanished, and de Montfort postulated that an attack by a kraken was to blame. In fact, the ships had been lost in a hurricane, and this rather rash statement was to be the beginning of the end for de Montfort, who became a scientific pariah. He probably didn't help matters when he jokingly suggested that the kraken's arms were so vast they could bridge the Straits of Gibraltar (8.9 miles/14km).

Unable to find work in any of France's scientific institutions, he retreated to the country and wrote books on bee keeping and linguistics. Returning penniless to Paris, he scratched a meagre living identifying shells for naturalists and collectors. He became a wretched figure and finally a destitute alcoholic. He was found dead of starvation in 1820, a pitiful end for a man once associated with the most august scientific institutes in Paris. Even though he created 25 genera still in use today, his career barely merits a footnote; somewhat gallingly, he was proved correct after his death when Danish zoologist Professor Johannes Japetus Smith Steenstrup published the first scientific description of the giant squid in 1857. To this day, de Montfort has been given little or no credit for his researches, despite having amassed the greatest number of accounts of giant cephalopods. Surely, his recognition by the scientific community is long overdue.

RICHARD FREEMAN is the zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology.

Fiction's first cryptozoologist

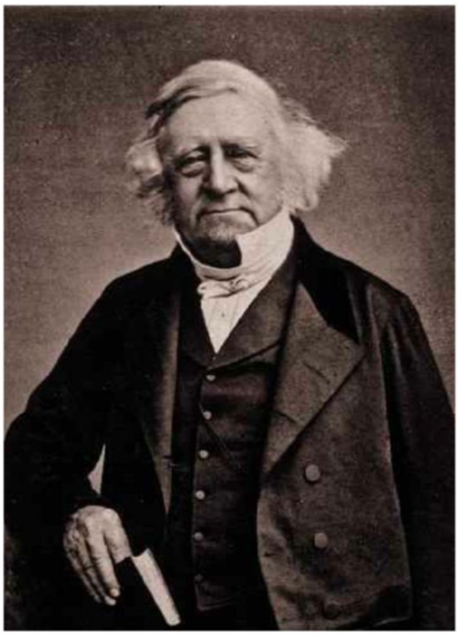
PETER COSTELLO finds a portrait of the first cryptozoologist in literature in Thomas Love Peacock's satirical novel *Nightmare Abbey*

The concept of cryptozoology was introduced by Dr Bernard Heuvelmans in the 1950s, the term becoming widely used in the course of the 1960s. But the idea itself – the pursuit and study of 'unknown' or legendary animals – was not new. Heuvelmans himself discusses several earlier pioneers, among them Denys de Montfort at the turn of the 18th century (see p55). But these men had many other interests, often in quite other areas of life.

The first presentation of a dedicated cryptozoologist is to be found, therefore, not in the scientific literature, but in fiction.

In the middle of November of 1818 Thomas Love Peacock, the friend and executor of the poet Shelley, published the third of his satirical social novels, *Nightmare Abbey*. Like several of his other novels, this one used the device of assembling in a country house a party of very varied characters, representative of various trends of thought or attitudes in society. The book remains very readable and vastly entertaining to those who like to see the fashionable pretentions of any age humorously satirised; in this book, it's the turn of the Scottish economists, the poets Shelley, Coleridge and Byron, the wit and essayist Sydney Smith, as well as transcendentalists and millenarian theologians.

About halfway through the novel, however, at the opening of chapter seven, Peacock introduces a new character. This is Mr Asterias, a celebrated ichthyologist. He is accompanied by his son Aquarius, who was reputedly brought into the world with the co-operation of a mermaid.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Thomas Love Peacock.

The Caithness mermaids had been a sensation of 1809

For Mr Asterias is not merely an expert on fishes of all kinds – his name comes from the scientific term for the starfish – he is a dedicated mermaid hunter, as Peacock explains:

"This gentleman had passed his life in seeking the living wonders of the deep through the four quarters of the world; he had a cabinet of stuffed and dried fishes, of shells, seaweeds, corals, and madrepores, that was the admiration and envy of the Royal Society. He had penetrated into the watery den of the sepia octopus, disturbed the conjugal happiness of that turtle-dove of the ocean, and come off victorious in a sanguinary conflict. He had been becalmed in the tropical seas, and had watched, in eager expectation, though unhappily always in vain, to see the colossal polypus rise from the water, and entwine its enormous arms round the masts and the rigging. He maintained the origin of all things from water, and insisted that the polypodes were the first of animated things, and that, from their round bodies and many-shooting arms, the Hindus had taken their gods, the most ancient of deities. But the chief object of his ambition, the end and aim of his researches, was to discover a triton and a mermaid, the existence of which he most potently and implicitly believed, and was prepared to demonstrate, *a priori, a posteriori, a fortiori*, synthetically and analytically, syllogistically and inductively, by arguments deduced both from acknowledged facts and plausible hypotheses."

Newspaper reports that a mermaid had been seen "sleeking her soft alluring locks" on the sea-coast of Lincolnshire,[1] had brought him in great haste down from London, to pay a long-promised visit to his old acquaintance, Mr Glowry, the proprietor of Nightmare Abbey and the genial host of these various eccentric guests, a company into which Mr Asterias fitted very nicely.

The notion that real mermaids could be seen off the coasts of Great Britain derived not from Peacock's imagination, but from a recently topical controversy that had been a matter of conversation throughout Great Britain.

This was the affair of the Caithness Mermaids, and the acrimonious dispute they gave rise to. Here indeed were modern mermaid reports in the newspapers of the kind that had brought Asterias to Nightmare Abbey.

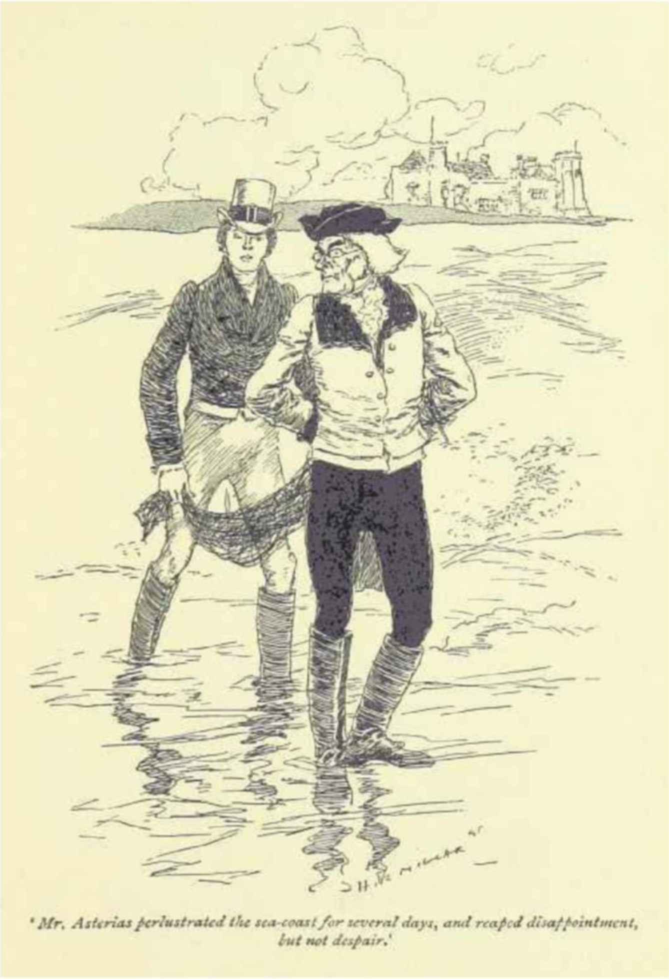
The Caithness mermaids had been a sensation of 1809, and had involved two ladies of Sandside, near Truro, the daughters of the local Church of Scotland minister, and a local teacher, a Mr Munro, whose encounter had taken place in 1798.

These reports, made by educated witnesses of social standing, were taken seriously by Sir John Sinclair, the district's great landlord. He was an important public figure in Scotland, a member of Parliament and a distinguished statistician of the kind that Peacock would have been well aware of. Sir John laid his scientific reputation on the line by adding the creature (whatever it was) to the list of the fauna of his northern county, much to the derision of southerners.

Mr Asterias's search for the mermaid arouses amusement among the other guests. One of these, a fashionable fop named Listless, asks him if he positively believed there were such things as mermaids? "Most assuredly", says Mr Asterias, "and tritons too". Things that were half human and half fish, Mr Listless wonders.

"Precisely. They are the orang-utans of the sea. But I am persuaded that there are also complete sea men, differing in no respect from us, but that they are stupid, and covered with scales; for, though our organisation seems to exclude us essentially from the class of amphibious animals, yet anatomists well know that the *foramen ovale* may remain open in an adult, and that respiration is, in that case, not necessary to life: and how can it be otherwise explained

that the Indian divers, employed in the pearl fishery, pass whole hours under the water; and that the famous Swedish gardener of Troningholm lived a day and a half under the ice without being drowned?”


'Mr. Asterias perlustrated the sea-coast for several days, and reaped disappointment, but not despair.'

ABOVE: Mr Asterias's search for the mermaid causes considerable amusement among Nightmare Abbey's other guests.

The reference to orangutans may need clarification. The Western or Lowland gorilla would not be described until 1847, on the basis of remains from Liberia. However, the orangutan had been known since the 17th century, and had been the subject of much speculation, especially by Lord Monboddo, the 18th century Scottish philosopher. As a term for a man-like entity it came naturally to Mr Asterias's mind (and to Peacock's pen). The ichthyologist then gives a brief resumé of some more or less modern encounters with such creatures.

Mr Listless and the other guests are astonished. But Mr Listless questions the *cui bono* of all this fatigue and expense. Who does it all benefit? Mr Asterias is provoked into defending his own dedicated search for mermaids, and the reasons behind it.

Mr Asterias, who readers and critics still persist in seeing as an absurd person despite Peacock's intention to the contrary, proceeds to give the company an encomium on the universal benefits of pure research, which is not intended to be seen in any way as absurd, but to be read as a serious justification of his vocation. It is a pæan in praise of all true scientific endeavour, and one which most serious researchers would agree with today.

The ideas in Peacock's novels are built up through conversations, but the philosophy of Mr Asterias is expressed in two long and very striking passages, both of which are relevant, I think, to the history of cryptozoology:

“I have made many voyages, Mr Listless, to remote and barren shores: I have travelled over desert and inhospitable lands: I have defied danger – I have endured fatigue – I have submitted to privation. In the midst of these I have experienced pleasures which I would not at any time have exchanged for that of existing and doing nothing. I have known many evils, but I have never known the worst of all, which, as it seems to me, are those which are comprehended in the inexhaustible varieties of ennui: spleen, chagrin, vapours, blue devils, time-killing, discontent, misanthropy, and all their interminable train of fretfulness, querulousness, suspicions, jealousies, and fears, which have alike infected society, and the literature of society; and which would make an arctic ocean of the human mind, if the more humane pursuits of philosophy and science did not keep alive the better feelings and more valuable energies of our nature.”

Here Mr Listless remarks that the philosopher seems to be “severe upon our fashionable belles-lettres”. But again Mr Asterias speaks plainly:

“Surely not without reason, when pirates, highwaymen, and other varieties of the extensive genus Marauder, are the only *beau ideal* of the active, as splenetic and railing misanthropy is of the speculative energy. A gloomy brow and a tragical voice seem to have been of late the characteristics of fashionable manners: and a morbid, withering, deadly, antisocial sirocco, loaded with moral and political despair, breathes through all the groves and valleys of the modern Parnassus; while science moves on in the calm dignity of its course, affording to youth delights equally pure and vivid – to maturity, calm and grateful occupation – to old age, the most pleasing recollections and inexhaustible materials of agreeable and salutary reflection; and, while its votary enjoys the disinterested pleasure of enlarging the intellect and increasing the comforts of society, he is himself independent of the caprices of human intercourse and the accidents of human fortune. Nature is his great and inexhaustible treasure. His days are always too short for his enjoyment: ennui is a stranger to his door. At peace with the world and with his own mind, he suffices to himself, makes all around him happy, and the close of his pleasing and beneficial existence is the evening of a beautiful day.” (Here a footnote by Peacock draws the reader's attention directly to remarks by Pierre Denys de Montfort in 1801, found at the start of the first volume of his *Histoire Naturelle des Mollusques; Vues Generales*, pp37-38.), the work from which Mr Asterias's image of the colossal polypus engulfing an entire ship is directly taken.

In Mr Asterias we have not only a rather charming and amusing portrait of a pioneer cryptozoologist, largely inspired by the notorious Denys de Montfort perhaps, but seriously intended by Peacock. Here surely is a literary hero for all admirers of Charles Fort. What Mr Asterias has to say in defence of science and the philosophical benefits of what we would call today fortean research deserves to be more widely noticed.

NOTE

1 An allusion to the line on Sabrina, the Roman nymph of the River Severn, in Milton's masque *Comus* (1634).

PETER COSTELLO, a writer and editor based in Dublin, is the author of numerous books, largely in the field of history and literature, including biographies of James Joyce, Flann O'Brien and others. His most recent book is Conan Doyle Detective. *His first book, the cryptozoological classic* In Search of Lake Monsters *(1974), is now available in a new edition.*

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Ugly duckling outside, but inside…

The mediæval Voynich Manuscript has been pored over by generations of scholars, alchemists and cryptographers – and the essays alongside the facsimile only emphasise its enduring mystery

The Voynich Manuscript

Ed. Raymond Clemens

Yale University Press 2016

Hb, facsimile + essays, ind, US$50, ISBN 9780300217230

However much you've read about it before, two things come as a surprise when you first see the Voynich Manuscript – or (for most of us) a quality facsimile. First, how small and tatty it is; second, how quickly you become utterly mesmerised by its contents. Scholar Deborah Harkness mentions in her introduction to this facsimile that when she saw the Voynich MS, "at first glimpse it was oddly anticlimactic: small, worn and drab outside; cramped and confusing inside, with tiny handwriting and sprawling imagery".

It must be the most famous book-that-no-one-has-a-clue-what-it's-about in the world. There's over 100 pages of botanical drawings, with text; the plants aren't identifiable, and the text isn't decipherable. Then there are pages of what appear to be astronomical and/or astrological drawings, but again the star patterns aren't identifiable. And then there are pages of detailed text, with marginal drawings of women in baths, and odd pipework. Then we're back to plants, but with what appear, perhaps, to be recipes rather than just descriptive text. The final section is about 30 pages of short individual statements (sayings? aphorisms? verses?) rather than continuous text, with a small star (or flower?) in the margin before each one.

There are so many questions about the Voynich MS. Who wrote it? And why? What on earth is the script it's written in? Is it actually a language in itself, or a symbol-transcription of another language – in which case which? What are the plants in all the detailed botanical drawings? And what is going on with the drawings of naked women in baths…? Basically, what the hell is it all about?

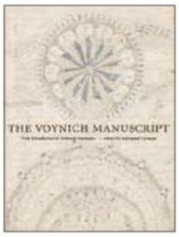
Many hands have held the book, says Harkness, "mathematicians, botanists, alchemists, cryptographers, clerics, university professors – yet none of them have managed convincingly to solve its mysteries".

This facsimile is from Yale University, which now owns the manuscript. The page size (12" x 9", 330mm x 230mm) is quite a bit larger than that of the manuscript (8½–9" x 6", 215–230mm x 150mm). One wishes the facsimile could have physically looked like a facsimile, but that would have been impractical; the original pages aren't all quite the same size and some of them are torn. Full marks to the publishers, designers and printers for including a number of fold-out pages, some double- or triple-width or double-height; one, unfolded, is nearly six times the size of the book. These pages are impressive; they must have been a production nightmare.

So what do we learn from the collection of scholarly essays – the first since 1978 – accompanying this facsimile? We now know that the parchment has been carbon-dated to 1404–38. This rules out Voynich's own favourite origin theory, that the 13th-century monk-scientist Roger Bacon was the author; he also thought that John Dee owned it at one point, apparently basing this on no more evidence than an historical novel. There's some provenance in correspondence from the early 17th century, in which the then owner of the MS asked the German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher if he could decipher it; Kircher looked at a few pages and said no.

"Voynich's origin theory was that monk-scientist Roger Bacon was the author"

The essays don't "propose any new theories for unravelling the mystery of the Voynich Manuscript". One looks at the earliest known owners, up to the Jesuits who Voynich bought it from in 1912. There's no proof that John Dee ever had anything to do with it, but in the 16th century it was certainly at the court of Emperor Rudolf II of Prague, who was fascinated equally by art and alchemy; ultra-violet photography reveals the faded signature of his imperial chemist on the first page. (There's a long technical essay on the physical state of the MS: its make-up, parchment, ink etc.)



THE VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT

Another essay explores Wilfrid Michael Voynich (1864–1930) himself; he came from a Polish family living in Lithuania, and seems to have been a bit of a rogue. He was imprisoned in Warsaw, exiled to Siberia, on the run in Mongolia. He hung out with Russian revolutionary groups in London and (after 10 years of cohabiting) married Ethel Boole, daughter of the creator of Boolean algebra, who became a successful novelist. Voynich opened his first antiquarian bookshop in Soho Square in 1898, moving to larger premises in Shaftesbury Avenue in 1905. The Voynich MS was one of several he bought from the Jesuit Collegio Romano; he sold all the rest of them, but described the MS as the "ugly duckling", still unsold at the time of his death. Thirty years later it was sold to a mediævalist book dealer who, after seven years failing to sell it himself, donated it to a library at Yale University.

Another looks at the so-far fruitless attempts by cryptanalysts to crack the supposed cypher; "the best book-length introduction to 'this elegant enigma' was written by [a] government cryptologist… and published in-house by the US National Security Agency" – America's equivalent of Britain's GCHQ.

One of the most interesting essays compares the Voynich MS with alchemical works, in which illustrations sometimes show a man and a woman bathing, to illustrate the dissolution of gold and silver in a solvent – but the illustrations in the Voynich MS are predominantly of several women bathing, so the usual alchemical meaning is unlikely.

The Voynich MS has not only inspired generations of enthusiasts dedicated to deciphering it – none with any success – but also works of fiction and music. And this fascination continues; as editor Raymond Clemens writes, "it is likely to be one of the most viewed and discussed artefacts from the mediæval period, perhaps second only to the Shroud of Turin". This beautiful facsimile will make it available for many more people to become enticed and entranced by it.

David V Barrett

★★★★★

Respect, not just belief

This is not the definitive biography of astronomer–ufologist Hynek, but it zips along while charting his move to astronomical apostasy

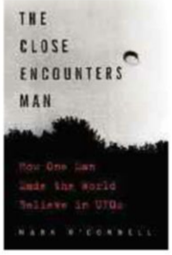
The Close Encounters Man

How One Man Made the World Believe in UFOs

Mark O'Connell

Dey St./William Morrow 2017

Pb, 416pp, illus, notes, ind, $17.99, ISBN 9780062484178



As ghastly subtitles go, it's hard to beat the one Jim Steinmeyer got saddled with when he wrote *Charles Fort: The Man Who Invented the Supernatural*. Still, this one gives the Fort biography a run for its money. In the ultra-polemical rhetoric of anomalies debate, 'belief' and 'believe' are intended to demean, to convey the notion that acceptance of extraordinary phenomena is so removed from imaginable possibility that no one could entertain it without protruding eyeballs and a slack jaw.

Astronomer/ufologist J Allen Hynek (1910–1986) did not, of course, intend for the world to 'believe' in UFOs, only to give them respectful attention and scientific treatment owing to what he deemed their potential importance. I could have figured that out just by reading *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry* (1972), which nearly half a century on remains the finest book in the literature. I claim, however, an additional circumstance: as a board member of Hynek's Center for UFO Studies and editor of *CUFOS' International UFO Reporter*, I knew him personally and reasonably well over the last 11 years of his life.

Among the most entertaining of human beings, Hynek possessed an abundance of wit, warmth, and storytelling ability. On his sober side he was committed to science, which is how, after participation in direct investigations of reports to a degree few can match, he came to champion UFOs as something scientists ought to investigate systematically.

He failed, of course, in that ambition, not because he was wrong but because … well, that's a question future philosophers and historians of science will surely puzzle out. Perhaps the simple answer, as some social scientists and journalists have argued, is that the UFO question turned out to be too big, too demanding, too obtrusive. Better to shove the reports into the Explanatron, where Rube Goldberg schemes provide a solution – often enough, multiple solutions – for every occasion. The number of "prosaic"solutions proposed for the Kenneth Arnold sighting (the subject of Dr Bruce Maccabee's recent, authoritative monograph *Three Minutes in June*), which started it all, is beyond counting..

Allen Hynek, accomplished astronomer (at Ohio State University, Northwestern University, and elsewhere), certainly merits a comprehensive biography. If this isn't it, *Close Encounters Man* manages still to be crisply written and eminently readable. Whole pages fly by, though, without a single mention of its ostensible subject, of whom Mark O'Connell could have said more if he'd interviewed more of us who knew him. The proper title might have been 'J Allen Hynek and the UFO Phenomenon', since much of the text is devoted to scrutiny of cases that caught Hynek's active or passive attention. If these incidents are well known to those versed in ufology, O'Connell makes them feel vital again, even revelatory, by taking care to base his writing on primary documents and keeping his judgments measured.

The Close Encounters Man provides a serviceable account of Hynek's early work on binary stars and later involvement with weapons technology and satellites. From the beginning his colleagues respected and even revered him as a hard-working, creative professional with an almost limitless scientific curiosity. On the other hand, the story of Hynek's accidental intersection with UFO reports – he was the nearest astronomer to Ohio's Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where the Air Force's UFO project was headquartered, and thus got tapped as scientific consultant – is much chronicled elsewhere. O'Connell produces no surprises.

From a dependable servant of the UFO-bashing company line, Hynek came to voice an at first muted dissent which over time and growing volume alienated him from Blue Book and its head, the borderline-unhinged UFOphobe Major Hector Quintanilla. Meanwhile, as Hynek quietly gathered scientific allies in an informal "Invisible College," most of his prominent astronomer colleagues came to see him as an apostate. In O'Connell's telling, the late Carl Sagan emerges as particularly cynical, charmless, and cowardly.

A man of Hynek's intellectual bravery deserves a sympathetic treatment, and he has one here. But the full treatment waits for the day when scientists, making up for long neglect, turn back to reconsider the phenomenon and do what Allen Hynek wanted them to do in the first place. They`re sure to start by reading *The UFO Experience.*

Jerome Clark

★★★★☆

The Ascent of Gravity

The Quest to Understand the Force that Explains Everything

Marcus Chown

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2017

Hb, xx + 268pp, notes, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781474601863

Gravity certainly isn't "the force that explains everything", and to the best of my knowledge no one has ever claimed that it is. On the other hand, it's played a key role in pushing forward our understanding of the Universe at three different points in history. The first was in the 17th century, when Newton came up with a mathematically simple, but metaphysically awkward, theory of gravity as "action at a distance" that explained virtually all the orbital motions in the Solar System. Then in the early 20th century, gravity became topical again when Einstein replaced Newton's theory with his mathematically horrendous, but metaphysically satisfying, concept of space–time curvature. Now, a century later, gravity is at the forefront of research for a third time, with the ongoing quest for a unified theory of gravity and quantum physics.

It doesn't seem that long ago (about four years, actually) that I reviewed Brian Clegg's *Gravity* [**FT296:62**], which covers all these ideas in a fascinating and absorbing package. Does the world really need another book, by another British writer of the same generation and similar background, on exactly the same subject? I'm not sure that it does. As someone who reads a lot of popular science, I found Chown's book shallower than Clegg's, with a lot of hackneyed material easily found in many other places, and fewer of the "I never realised that" insights that Clegg offers. On the other hand, for someone who is new to physics and the history of science, Chown's book would be a better place to start than Clegg's – and probably a more enjoyable read. Looking back at that earlier review, my main criticism of Clegg's approach was that he underplayed the "detective mystery" aspect of the subject – and that's certainly something Chown captures to perfection.

Andrew May

★★★★☆

The Inkblots

Hermann Rorschach, His Iconic Test, and the Power of Seeing

Damion Searls

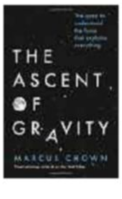
Simon & Schuster UK
Pb, 416pp, illus, bib, ind, £20.00

Part biography, part cultural history, *The Inkblots* is a thorough, if somewhat pedantic, look at Hermann Rorschach's famous "inkblots" – 10 cards, the same then as now, consisting of symmetrical, abstract swirls of ink, a marriage of art and science meant to unlock the viewer's unconscious, and designed, Searls observes, to "get around your defenses and conscious strategies of self-presentation". This approach was once considered revolutionary, yet is now largely viewed as pseudoscience. The outré has become cliché, a psychological test uniquely without consistent criteria or results.

Hermann Rorschach, a contemporary of Sigmund Freud and a student of Carl Jung and Eugen Bleuler, developed his psychological "experiment" while working among the patients of a Swiss insane asylum. Interestingly, he considered it not as a test but rather, in Damion Searls's description, as "a nonjudgmental and open-ended investigation into people's ways of seeing". An amateur artist and the son of an art teacher, Rorschach introduced into modern psychology concepts originating in Renaissance Europe more readily associated with art interpretation, developing the inkblots as a means of determining whether his patients' unique perceptions of these forms might illuminate the nature of their pathologies.

At first, those with severe mental disorders, such as schizophrenia or manic depression, interpreted the blots differently from the "normal" controls. Stirred by these early successes and pressured into adapting his experiment into a more generalised aptitude test, Rorschach retrospectively developed a theoretical basis, with a vague and complex scoring system, for his experimental methodology. Unfortunately, he died when he was only 37 without having provided a convincing demonstration of how the inkblots worked. Despite its unclear system and unverifiable results, the Rorschach Test became widespread among therapists in both its use and applicability, from employment applications to classroom, military and courtroom settings, and from custody battles to the Nuremberg trials.

The test reached the height of its popularity in the 1960s (Searls estimates that during this decade the inkblots were used a million times a year) before its reputation began to decline.



DAMION SEARLS
INKBLOTS

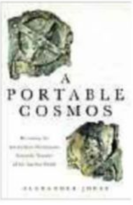
While some psychologists continue to use the inkblots to detect mental disorders, its non-reproducibility, objectivity and reliability as a scientific method make it inconclusive. Though Searls at first hesitates to draw any conclusions concerning the test's accuracy, he suggests that the inkblots work no better than chance, implying that psychology as a scientific method works better through inference and intuition, and that, unlike the physical sciences, replication in itself is not the ultimate criterion of any given psychological method's success. Perhaps this most recognisable form of pop psychology works better as metaphor than science, thus lending itself to repeated cultural depictions in literature and film, from Andy Warhol to Alan Moore to Jay Z.

In the end, Searls' biography/cultural history, despite its meticulousness, is something of a missed opportunity; Searls, a novelist and translator of Döblin, Rilke, Gide and others, seems attracted to the notion of æsthetics as a means of unlocking the recesses of the human mind. He regrettably focuses on the test's methodology and the infighting among its practitioners during what was, at the time, an infant science. He largely ignores the impact of the test on its subjects, much as Rorschach himself placed more credibility on his interpretations of results than the experiences of his patients.

There are important lessons to be drawn from the somewhat fascistic tendency among psychologists and social scientists to focus on safer, more predictable, generalised psychological systems than on the more mercurial and unpredictable individuated realm of the human mind, thereby forcing individuals to fit into neat concepts as opposed to developing methodologies elastic enough to respond to highly differentiated and unique mental disorders. In this sense, the inkblots are emblematic of an era that prized personality tests as a tool of conformism and social design, a kind of psychological Levittown.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★☆



A Portable Cosmos

Alexander Jones

Oxford University Press 2017
Hb, 208pp, ifigs, notes, bib, ind, £22.99, ISBN XXXXX

I came across a Greek company selling museum-grade replicas of archæological objects at a museums conference a while back. Pride of place was given to a working replica of the Antikythera Mechanism, a rectangular box with three dials showing the movements of the Sun and planets, controlled by interlocking gears. The original is so unlike anything else from antiquity that it has been considered proof of alien contact, evidence of time travel, a gift of the gods or a last remnant of lost Atlantis – quite a legacy for a few pieces of corroded metal recovered in 1901 from a Hellenistic shipwreck.

A Portable Cosmos traces the journey from junk to world treasure, and Jones has produced what is likely to be the definitive work on this piece of technology. He tells a gripping tale of the discovery of a few chunks of sea-corroded bronze hauled up by sponge divers off the island of Antikythera. They were mainly interested in the cargo of bronze statuary. The mechanism was unappreciated and ignored except by a few obsessives, who realised that it was the remains of something unique.

Investigation the Antikythera Mechanism was limited to chipping away accretions and trying to discern what was inside and how it might once have fitted together. This was hampered by the fact that only part of the mechanism had been recovered, and that even that had been crushed. It was not until the late 1950s, when X-rays and other technologies allowed non-intrusive investigation, that it was possible to make headway in understanding and reconstructing the device, allowing a more or less complete understanding of its workings to be arrived at by the first few years of this century.

Jones lays out the mechanism step by step, then looks at how the parts come together to create the portable cosmos of the title. He covers the technical detail in a very readable manner, drawing you into the world of the device and sharing his fascination with the machine and its makers.

Jones spreads his net wider, though. He looks at the cultural context within which the mechanism was created, from the workings of ancient calendars to the cultural reasons such things might have been needed, and from possible manufacturers of the equipment to who would want to use such a thing and why. He makes it clear that it is not something miraculous dropped from the heavens; rare, yes, but not alien to its culture – there are references to likely similar equipment in classical literature.

The technologies that come together to make the mechanism are known to have existed elsewhere in the classical world. It is not perfect: the triangular teeth on the cogs are a less than ideal shape for the job, for example. It is likely, though, that only a few workshops were capable of making such tech in the Greek world, and their output was so limited that it is surprising that even this artefact survived.

Isaac Asimov lamented that the innovation behind the Antikythera Mechanism did not spark a technical revolution 2,000 years ago. It proved to be a dead end, and the ideas behind it not were not rediscovered for another 1,000 years. He said: "If the insight of the Greeks had matched their ingenuity…we would not be merely puttering around on the Moon, we would have reached the nearer stars."

Ian Simmons

★★★★☆

AI

Its Nature and Future

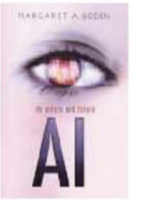
Margaret A Boden

Oxford University Press 2016

Hb, 198pp, ilus, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9780198777984

Optimists believe that artificial intelligence (AI) will help overcome almost every issue facing humanity, including war, pestilence, hunger and even, by uploading consciousness, death. Pessimists envisage a future closer to Skynet where the machines take control. I'm sceptical: AI, at least in our lifetimes, is proving to be neither as good nor as bad as optimists and pessimists predict. Indeed, I have a sneaking suspicion that if AI ever reaches the kitchen we'll drink, as Arthur Dent found, "a liquid that was almost, but not quite, entirely unlike tea".

One of the problems facing any discussion of AI is defining what 'intelligence' actually is: it's a notoriously subtle, multifaceted and enigmatic concept. I love pondering a chess problem. Yet I can set my Fritz chess program to beat me easily. My social and emotio intelligence would get me expelled from the Amalgam Union of Wallflowers, Reclus and Associated Timid People for being too shy. Yet AI is beginning to model emotion intelligence, such as when 'computer companions' respond with sympathy or sexually alluring behaviours and speech. Sooner or later they'll beat me there as well, I suspect. After all, they're all facets of intelligence, all depend on processing data, all rely on evaluating information. But are they really more 'intelligent' in the sense we generally use the term? I hope not.



Boden defines AI as seeking "to make computers do the sorts of things that minds can do". She points out that intelligence is "a richly structured space of diverse information-processing capacities". This definition allows Boden to cover the five major types of AI: classical AI; artificial neural networks; evolutionary programming; cellular automata; and dynamical systems. While the forms and uses of AI differ widely, all are essentially systems that process information.

Often portrayed as the wave of the future, many aspects of AI have a surprisingly long intellectual heritage. In the 1840s, for example, Lady Ada Lovelace predicted elements that now form part of the foundations of AI – such as processing symbols that potentially represent "all subjects in the universe". Lovelace's interest in logic inspired her description of several basic programming concepts, including stored programs, hierarchical subroutines and bugs. In the late 1950s, Arthur Samuel developed a program that beat its creator at draughts.

By the 1960s "an intellectual schism" had developed between AI researchers interested in life, who worked in cybernetics, and those interested in mind, who worked on symbolic computing. Researchers interested in networks covered mind and brain. But as they mainly studied associative learning, they were closer to cybernetics. Boden notes that "there was scant mutual respect between these increasingly separate sub-groups". She eloquently traces the implications and developments that arose from this schism. While AI discussions inevitably focus on the future, Boden traces the discipline's fascinating history, which helps place all the hype in context.

We might not have the T-800, Marvin or Deep Thought. But AI drives robots on Mars, animates Hollywood movies, distracts you with mobile phone apps, hopefully gets you to where you're going with sat-navs, and predicts stock market movements. AI is already so ubiquitous that, arguably, we all need at least a passing acquaintance with its core concepts, ideas and trends. Boden's book is an excellent, accessible introduction even for the complete AI novice.

Less prosaically, Boden notes that philosophers use AI concepts to help illuminate issues such as free will, consciousness and human creativity. Biologists use AI to model aspects of living organisms and hopefully better understand the elusive nature of life. Indeed, despite AI's achievements, Boden's eloquent book also shows just how remarkable the human brain really is. "AI has taught us that human minds are hugely richer, and more subtle, than psychologists previously imagined," she writes. "Indeed that is *the* main lesson to be learned from AI" (italics in original).

Mark Greener

★★★★☆

A Cabinet of Ancient Medical Curiosities

Strange Tales and Disturbing Facts from the Healing Arts of Greece and Rome

J C McKeown

Oxford University Press 2017

Hb, xiv + 286, illus, $18.95, ISBN9780190610432

(Review amplifiable by my essay, **FT312:32–4**. Jim Steinmeyer's biography (p260) says: "Visiting a physician was an act of desperation for Fort. He distrusted doctors," adding that Fort's "slips on medicine" are in the Tiffany Thayer papers.)

As delightful as his earlier 'Cabinets' of Greek and Roman Curiosities (**FT268:58; FT309:60**), McKeown and I complete our hat-tricks with this new compendium.

A stuffy review (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2017.05.05 – online) by Winston Black upbraids McKeown for his "vicious humour" and for preferring entertainment to 'enlightenment'. This largely ignores McKeown's professed aim in the series. Still, it's a cue for remembering among this fortean jamboree some impressive ancient medical 'firsts': Hippocrates (e.g.) diagnosed epilepsy correctly, also realised the astonishing properties of aspirin; Greek gynæcologist Soranus (careful how you pronounce his name) – McKeown rightly says he deserves more attention – recognised the condition and seriousness of pre-menstrual tension.

After a nifty self-parodying Preface, McKeown organises his material under twelve rubrics: Medicine, Religion, Magic; Doctors in Society; Attitudes to Doctors; Some Famous Doctors (expanded in his 12-page Glossary); Anatomy; Sex; Women and Children; Preventive Medicine; Prognosis and Diagnosis; Particular Ailments and Conditions; Treatments and Cures – two general chapters postlude, along with coin images and illustrations (69 b-w) credits.

No Index, this perhaps hardly possible in such an anthology. No Bibliography either. Attention might profitably have been drawn to the countless books and articles 'Out There', often arcanely fascinating pieces online (a resource McKeown underplays), for easy instance Helen King's 'Galen and the Widow: Towards a History of Therapeutic Masturbation in Ancient Gynaecology,' *Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* I (2011), 205–35 – from the Open University.

Each chapter comprises a host of translated extracts from Græco-Roman texts, authors and passages meticulously set out, buttressed by linking commentaries both richly factual – a virtue ignored by Black – and enlivened by McKeown's infectious humour.

Mining the nuggets could almost fill an entire *FT*. Readers may reap a richer harvest from Black, who had far more space than I, plus my own aforementioned *FT* essay.

I dare say many will fast-forward to the Sex-tion. Much 'topical' stuff here. Pullulates with transgenders (both ways), without any prattling about their 'rights'. Men with small cocks may be consoled (their women, too) by Aristotle's claim that big ones are liable to infertility. Those who cannot afford Viagra might consider trying Byzantine Paul of Aegina's prescription: "Burn a gecko, grind its ashes into fine powder, pour on olive oil, apply to right foot's big toe, then have sex."

My favourite, though, of the multifarious remedies is the one advocated by Pliny (*Natural History* 28.76) for headaches: "Tie a woman's brassiere around the forehead." Were this better publicised, and shown to work, it would put many pharmaceutical companies out of business.

Barry Baldwin

★★★★★

ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

The Monster Book

Nick Redfern

Visible Ink 2017

Pb, $19.95, 416pp, bib, index. ISBN 9781578595754

It was only a matter of time before Nick Redfern pulled together his cryptozoological adventures and discoveries (and more besides) into an encyclopedia format... and here it is. Covering nearly 200 creatures or entities, real and supposed, and profusely illustrated, it is a valuable resource for serious and casual readers. Just as importantly, Redfern's exposition is well written, reliable and balanced. Ideal for libraries and schools.

The Lost Continent of Pan

Susan B Martinez

Bear & Co 2016

Pb, $24.00, 501pp, illus, bib, ind, ISBN 9781591432678

Dr Martinez, a linguist, waves a warning finger: "Like cures for cancer which are promptly banned by the medical establishment, cures for our ignorance of prehistory are likewise burked, bullied and blackballed." We warm to her already! In this profusely illustrated (by exempla and pictures) book, she revisits the theories and proponents of the idea that world culture originated in a long-lost oceanic civilisation. Eschewing the more familiar Atlantic-centric notions, she makes a feisty argument, instead, for the northern Pacific. She reboots the legendary continents of Lemuria and Mu, re-interpreting such gloriously unconventional sources as Oahspe (an alternative 'bible' written in a trance in 1880 by a dentist) and the fantasy history of Mu by James Churchward. The greater part of the book, though, lays out arguments based upon linguistics, demonstrating fascinating levels of correspondence between primary vocabularies of ancient cultures from both sides of the Pacific. Martinez's thesis is detailed, cleverly (even humorously) argued and surprisingly easy to read. By exploring the 'grey areas' in the conventional understanding of ancient history of the world and the origin of its peoples, she manages to make her ideas seem disturbingly plausible and refreshingly provocative.

Academics with high blood pressure are advised to avoid the book but, as wacky as Martinez's premises and as wide-ranging as her sources might be, this is the biggest feast of archæological, cultural, technological and dating anomalies since the 'forbidden archæology' tomes of Michael Cremo and Richard Thompson.

Zecharia Sitchin and the Extraterrestrial Origins of Humanity

M J Evans

Bear & Co 2016

Pb, 210pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, $18.00, ISBN 9781591432555

Sitchin is known to fans of the 'ancient astronaut' hypothesis for his interpretations of Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform tablets; interpretations which, it has to be said, are contested by more orthodox scholars of ancient Semitic languages. Since his first book, *The 12th Planet* (1976), he has maintained that the tablets provide an account of an alien race, the Annunaki, from Nibiru, a planet beyond Neptune, hidden and known only to the Sumerians. Like the randy Greek gods, the Annunaki were sexual predators as well as teachers of mankind, whom they created in their own image. When the overpopulation and violence of their creation got too much, these gods waged a devastating war (with nuclear rockets) among themselves and on their creation, before abandoning this planet.

Sitchin's many sequels have sold millions of copies and have come to dominate the ancient astronaut 'industry' far beyond the 'successes' of von Däniken and Velikovsky. Are the academicians simply hot under the collar because Sitchin – who studied economics and worked in publishing and shipping – is an outsider intruding into the preserve of highly qualified archæologists, historians and linguists? That probably contributes to the vehemence of the hostility between those who support Sitchin's (mainly self-referencing) ideas and those who ask for proofs more detailed than his (relatively) unqualified statements, but it is not helpful in understanding Sitchin or his ideas.

Dr Evans, a former professor of geography at SUNY who has been an associate of Sitchin's for nearly 20 years, provides a welcome portrait of the man and his genre. Even if you disagree with Sitchin, here is insight into the man his chief academic critic, Dr Michael Heiser, acknowledges as "arguably the most important proponent of the ancient astronaut hypothesis".

The Golden Number

Matila C Ghyka; trans. Jon E Graham

Inner Traditions 2016

Hb, 434pp, illus, notes, ind, $37.94, ISBN 9781594771002

Although there had been editions in other languages since the first publication of this venerable study in 1931, this is its first appearance in English, in elegant translation and a handsome printing. Prince Matila Ghyka was a Romanian mathematician, historian, philosopher, novelist and poet who served in the French navy, taught æsthetics in the USA and served his country as a minister in London twice between 1936 and 1940. Because of his interest in the relationship of mathematics to art, he was attracted to Pythagorean philosophy and delighted in its practical applications (e.g. in geometry and architecture) and natural expressions in nature (e.g. in the spirals of shells, or the spacing of flower petals). The core of this ancient philosophy was the secret (originally known only to the Pythagorean cult initiates) of a 'magical' relationship (known as *phi*) of parts to a whole (also known as the Golden Number or Golden Ratio). While some critics have called the text dull or plodding (what can they expect from erudite and intelligent prose written 85 years ago?) Ghyka more than makes up for it in the brilliance of his insights and profuse illustrations. What lifts this tome even further above the ordinary are the philosophical and historical diversions (even chapters) upon Pythagoras and his followers over centuries and their effects upon the societies in which they lived. Some of the subjects touched upon are the relationships of numbers to harmony in music and poetry; the chains of Pythagorean knowledge that link maths, geometry, music, art and architecture from the 5th century BC, through the Reformation and into the present (indeed, the Golden Ratio is still taught to design students throughout Europe to this day); the proportions of temples and cathedrals; the evolution of forms; how the Pythagorean symbol of life (a pentagram) became a symbol of evil through the historical persecution of secretive cults; lunar cycles and other natural rhythms'; Masonic symbolism; Gnosticism and alchemy; and how all of these have influenced modern scientists and artists. Fascinating.

A Pilgrim's Guide to Sacred London

John Michell & Jason Goodwin

Argonaut Books 2017

Pb, £7.99, 187pp, illus, ind, ISBN 9780957254039

This is the second of a delightful series of guidebooks for antiquarian, spiritual and New Age pilgrims published by the historian Jason Goodwin and Isaac Goodwin (the son and grandson of the late John Michell). What sets them apart from the usual tourist fare is their erudite approach to the 'sacred landscape' that can still be found beneath or behind the everyday appearances of places. They have built upon John's writing and notes in a way that is edifying and satisfying, and through which one can discern John's voice as though he were your personal guide. This pocket-sized, handsomely printed book identifies four main walking itineraries – Westminster, the Tower, Aldgate and the Thames (and its historical crossings) – each furnished with priceless information. There is a fascinating list of 'diversions' from these routes to notable statues, cemeteries, shrines and museums; all supplemented with an essential history of the city from the time of King Brutus the Trojan.

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Lost in space

Luc Besson brings his *bande dessinée* passion project to the screen at last – but the results are an unsatisfying mixed bag of stunning visuals, miscast leads and a meandering narrative…

Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets

Dir Luc Besson, France 2017
On UK release

Luc Besson is responsible for several memorable and innovative cinematic efforts such as *Nikita*, *Léon* and *The Fifth Element*, and there's no question that his distinct style has left its mark on the cinema. With *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*, Besson's lifelong quest to bring the world of the highly influential *Valérian and Laureline* science-fiction comic series to life is finally complete, and the result of this independently financed passion project is undoubtedly one of the most visually stunning films to be released this year. *The Fifth Element* mixed vivid visuals with snappy humour and snappier editing, and *Valerian*, with its similar style and tone, gives the impression that the two films could easily be part of the same cinematic universe.

Valerian's opening sequence and the subsequent introduction to the people of Mül are both equally gorgeous and moving. The mission sequence that follows showcases just how interesting and layered this particular world is, and Besson continues this detailed world-building throughout the film by utilising digital effects to their fullest to create mesmerising visuals. That initial mission is also more than just a particularly entertaining action set piece, as it makes it very evident just how much inspiration George Lucas took from the *Valérian and Laureline* comics when creating his *Star Wars* universe. The problem is that it's therefore also all too easy to compare the dynamics of Valerian and Laureline's relationship to the interactions of Harrison Ford's Han Solo and Carrie Fisher's Leia in the *Star Wars* films. While the performances of Ford and Fisher are considered iconic thanks to a combination of excellent casting and remarkable chemistry, DeHaan and Delevingne are not only both miscast, they also fail to strike any sparks off each other at all, which makes it impossible for the viewer to invest in them.

> *It's evident how much inspiration George Lucas took from the comics*

DeHaan and Delevingne are not entirely to blame for the film's inability to engage its audience, though; DeHaan has proven his merit as an actor elsewhere, and Delevingne does the best she can. Instead, the main issue is rather Besson's lacklustre, half-baked script. Not only is the film full of stilted dialogue, but the structure of both character arcs, as well as the progression of the overarching narrative, are weighed down constantly by a highly convoluted plot; if this were easier to follow, it wouldn't be such a problem, but the focus all too often shifts to the myriad of visually stunning but narratively disengaging detours. As a result, *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* is undeniably breathtaking in terms of its visual achievements, but as a story it simply fails.

Leyla Mikkelsen

★★☆☆☆

The Odyssey

Dir Jérôme Salle, France 2016
On UK release from 18 August

For those who don't know, and that probably means anyone under 40, Jacques Cousteau was a household name in the 1970s for being the world's foremost undersea explorer. Nowadays, the sea is chock full of them, be they the submersible types who plumb the deepest depths, or BBC wildlife cameramen looking for footage for the next documentary. Back then, though, Cousteau was the main man, world famous for his underwater exploits, the Oscar-winning films which documented them and, it must be said, his canny self-promotion. Should you want to know a little bit more about the man behind the goggles then *The Odyssey* is the film for you.

It begins in 1949 with Cousteau (Lambert Wilson) in his late 30s. He's just invented the aqualung and is using it to explore the sea near his home in the south of France. His wife Simone (Audrey Tatou) and two sons Philippe and Jean-Michel soon learn to use the equipment too, and we see achingly beautiful sequences of them swimming together in the Mediterranean. Pretty soon, Jacques realises that he can turn his hobby into a career and gradually gathers sufficient funds and sponsorship to fit out his own boat – the *Calypso* – which he uses to travel the world making films about his deep sea adventures and scouting possible offshore drilling locations for oil companies. So successful is he that just being Cousteau becomes a global industry and he begins to drift away from the idealism of his first forays under the sea. Quick to pick up on this is favoured son Philippe (Pierre Niney) who starts to find all the

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

Streaming horror

Last month I took a gander at the horror streaming service Shudder and was suitably impressed, but how do the more mainstream platforms fare, scary-movie wise?

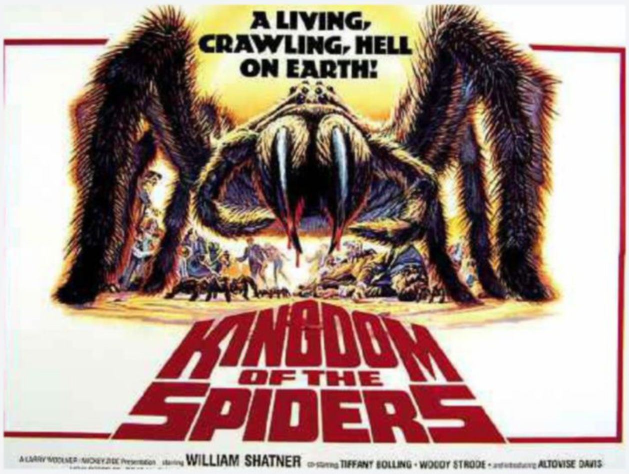
First up there's Netflix, which at first glance seems a bit flaky. Fire up their app and you'll see a slew of forgettable recent horrors like *Blair Witch* or the clumsily titled *Ouija Experiment 2: The Ouija Resurrection*. The trick is to skip Netflix's whacky film groupings ('Horror With a Strong Female Lead', 'Exciting Films' etc), and go straight to the Browse Categories section. It's often here that you'll spot the real gems, like Australian 'grief-personified' horror *The Babadook* or the funny yet gripping *Housebound* from New Zealand. The Kurt Russell western, *Bone Tomohawk* – in which a small town called Bright Hope is invaded by a marauding tribe of trogladytes – is another must-watch. What sounds like a trashy B-Movie turns out to be one of the classiest and most traumatising horror films I've seen in a while, with a beautiful script. Another quirky tip is *Late Phases* (aka *Night of the Wolf*) about a blind man defending a retirement complex from a werewolf.

> *It's about a blind man defending a retirement home from a werewolf*

Drill further down and you'll get some lovely retro treats too, like *The Skull*, *The Keep*, *Return of the Living Dead*, *From Beyond* and even… drum roll please…*Troll 2*! And you absolutely *must* watch *Let's Scare Jessica To Death*: a thoroughly haunting 1970s tale about a woman going mad… or is she? The fact that this movie is even on here makes you think there are some decent, upstanding people at Netflix HQ. Even the original Canadian slasher *My Bloody Valentine* turns up, as does the more obscure *Grabbers*, a giddy monster movie where an Irish island's only defence against tentacled aliens is to get drunk. Oh, and try *Creep* too, which is a pretty unsettling found footage movie, and the hypnotic *Phase IV* (the Saul Bass ant movie with a killer soundtrack and amazing close-up photography).

Amazon Prime Video (available to all prime members) looks a lot cheaper and nastier than either Shudder or Netflix. Apart from a few high-profile titles, most of their horror selection is straight-to-video stuff… but herein lies Amazon's hidden strength. There's some wonderfully obscure shlock in their catalogue, from *Jaws*-on-land rip-off *Grizzly*, to Shatner epic *Kingdom of the Spiders*, to the once banned bigfoot horror *Night of the Demon* (in which Sasquatch rips off a biker's penis). You'll even find vintage Christian End-Times horrors too, like *Image of the Beast*. Prime also has almost every season of *The Walking Dead*, if you like your horror a bit more mainstream. Alternatively, if you crave some horror ambience for your next wedding or Bar Mitzvah, why not tune in to the bizarre, three-hour atmospheric horror videos on offer, like *Skull Candles* or *Pumpkins in Trees*.

When it comes to horror streaming, I still think the selection on all platforms should be way, way bigger: Netflix only has *Friday the 13th Part 6*, for example, when they should clearly make the effort to have them all (including the 80s TV series). Yet, for now, the streaming model is at least offering horror fans new ways to easily dive into some varied content. Let's just hope they keep some horror geeks on those content selection panels.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branding – Cousteau's team all have to wear red beanie hats for the cameras – and exploitation of the marine environment at odds with his own feelings about ecology. This leads to conflict and eventually estrangement. At the same time, Simone begins to learn about the extent of her husband's international-class philandering. Thus the pattern is set: the film covers not only underwater goings on, but also seeks to examine Cousteau the man through his relationship with his family.

As you'd expect – and indeed might demand – from a film such as this, the underwater photography is just about the best you're ever likely to see, almost dreamlike in its beauty. The land-based stuff can't hope to compete with it and the combination of boardroom sequences, as Cousteau negotiates film and TV deals, and squabbles between husband and wife are not terribly interesting. The acting saves it though: Lambert Wilson, probably best known from the *Matrix* trilogy, is terrific as Cousteau, full of charm, charisma and self-obsession, and Pierre Niney makes for a decent foil as the idealistic prodigal son. Audrey Tatou has little to do other than age gracefully and snipe at her husband for his infidelities; evidently there were a lot.

Overall it's a curiously old-fashioned film, a 50s-style biopic that doesn't tell you a huge amount about its subject. A perfectly watchable but ultimately unremarkable movie.

Daniel King

★★★☆☆

Annabelle: Creation

Dir David F Sandberg, US 2017
On UK release from 11 August

The two *Conjuring* films have shown that the quality horror film is still alive and well; both were well received by critics and audiences alike due to their high production values: good acting, atmospheric set design and cinematography, and, of course, highly effective editing and sound. However, the first of the inevitable spin-offs, 2014's *Annabelle*, met with a less than stellar reception. The story of the titular demonic doll not only failed to impress critics, it also

left many fans of *The Conjuring* disappointed, as it failed to live up to the standards set by previous films. Apprehension about the prequel, *Annabelle: Creation*, then, is understandable, as the new film not only concerns the possessed plaything, but also focuses on the evil entity from the point of view of two young girls. As horror fans can confirm, child actors can either be unbearably cringe-worthy or increase the eeriness of a film substantially; thankfully, the performances of Talitha Bateman and Lulu Wilson fall into the latter category. They have no idea who the eponymous *Annabelle* is or what is at stake, their perspective nicely mirroring that of the audience. The obligatory exposition scene is placed so late in the film, and at a time where we have been pulled deep enough into the story, that the explanation feels both natural and necessary after the many well-executed moments of tension and terror.

The story of the doll's creation and what made it into a conduit for a demonic presence makes this far more effective than the first *Annabelle* film, and also creates a style and atmosphere that emphasises its stylistic and tonal connection with *The Conjuring*, while never becoming derivative of its source material. Instead, *Annabelle: Creation* feels like a natural companion piece to the other films in the franchise, and while it hardly reinvents the genre, it shows that good craftsmanship goes a long way in creating an effective horror film.

Leyla Mikkelsen

★★★★☆

A Ghost Story

Dir David Lowery, US 2017

On UK release from 11 August

The first thing to say about *A Ghost Story* is that it isn't a ghost story, at least not in the M R James sense. Admittedly, Casey Affleck's ghost appears as the classic white-sheeted phantom and, true, there is a brief sequence of poltergeist-style crockery throwing, but these are not what director David Lowery is really interested in. Rather, he uses the ghost as a vehicle to explore themes of loss, grief, loneliness and love. Unfortunately, he does this in a ponderous, vague and frankly pretentious manner, which renders the film largely ineffective.

Affleck's character is 'C' (it's typical of the film that the characters have initials instead of proper names; we should at least be grateful that they used upper case) and he is happily married to 'M' (Rooney Mara). When C is killed in a car accident M is naturally inconsolable, but what she can't see and doesn't know is that C has followed her home from the hospital, now clad in the white sheet that covered him in the morgue.

C silently observes his wife as she struggles to cope with her grief, unable to communicate with or even touch her. Eventually, she sells up and moves out, and we realise that C is tied to the place where he lived. The film then sees C haunting, in both senses, his former home as the endless years crawl by and new occupants come and go.

Terrence Malick has a lot to do with the current Hollywood vogue for solemn, portentous films which usually fall short of the profundity for which they are striving; the problem is that long and slow is mistaken for important and meaningful (even in Malick's own work). *A Ghost Story* avoids the first problem by being mercifully brief (around 90 minutes) but it *is* often painfully slow. One sequence in particular has been receiving plenty of attention: Rooney Mara sitting on her kitchen floor comfort-eating an entire chocolate pie that a sympathetic friend has made for her. For better or worse, it encapsulates the entire film: deliberately protracted, beautifully composed, but utterly devoid of meaning or purpose.

There are some good things about the film. Affleck and Mara are fine actors and despite being given precious little to work with they adroitly convey the love and grief that inevitably go hand in hand in human relationships. Lowery's choice of the 1.33:1 aspect ratio (not the usual widescreen one we're used to these days) is an unusual and interesting one, which he says he made to heighten the sense of containment, but the film gives the impression of playing with deep themes without ever really engaging with them properly.

Daniel King

★★☆☆☆

SHORTS

LOGAN

20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

As part of a franchise that has been as unstable as the Wolverine's temper, *Logan* takes a new approach by showing us a world that is significantly different from those of previous cinematic outings involving Marvel's X-Men. Since the grim and gritty approach to the superhero genre is hardly uncharted territory any more, people understandably voiced their concerns as to whether there was any good reason for director James Mangold to take this approach, with many expressing scepticism about the film's R-rating. Thankfully, these concerns proved groundless, as Wolverine is one of the few comic book characters suitable for a more darkly realistic and violent adaptation. Approaching *Logan* as a western-inspired road movie about a group of world-weary characters that have seen enough terrible things to last a lifetime is therefore a stroke of genius; and Hugh Jackman's final outing, after spending nearly two decades portraying the adamantium-enhanced anti-hero, shows plenty of style without neglecting the substance. The end result is an outstanding piece of cinema where Jackman's turn is not only impressive as a swansong for the character but as an all-round memorable performance in a film that's full of them, and so gripping that it ultimately makes a story about mutants deeply human. **LM** ★★★★★

THE RESIDENT

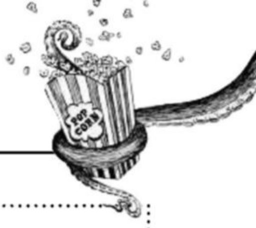
Second Sight, £9.99 (DVD)

Young couple Joanna (an impressive Tianna Nori) and Geoff (Mark Matechuk) sublet an eerie flat in an equally eerie building when Geoff gets a promising job opportunity. With Geoff constantly away to focus on his career, Joanna is stuck at home with their baby, feeling increasingly isolated. Left to her own devices, she begins to suspect that something horrible has happened in the flat and that the building may be haunted. Since the story of *The Resident* is hardly original, the potential success of the film depends on the execution, and first-time director John Ainslie thankfully makes the most of the low budget and simple premise. The visuals are moody and haunting, helping to create a delirious sense of time being warped, and the story unfold with suspenseful momentum. However, the film stumbles towards the end, where the sloppy execution of the climax to some extent undoes all Ainslie's good work, making the final product rather formulaic, if generally enjoyable. **LM** ★★★

THE VOID

Signature Entertainment, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

In recent years, horror has largely abandoned the practical effects of decades past in favour of terrors of a more psychological variety, and effects-based horror using CGI have often provoked laughter and groans rather than shocked gasps. Crowdfunded Lovecraftian horror *The Void* is therefore a welcome homage to old school body horror, often showcasing visuals reminiscent of both John Carpenter's 1982 classic *The Thing* and Clive Barker's 1987 *Hellraiser*. Thankfully, the film manages to be its own entity rather than an imitation of classic horrors, but while the gruesome visuals impress and the ambiguity of the film's depiction of time and place emphasises the Lovecraftian elements, things are severely lacking in the plot department. While this is evidently a choice that was made to ensure the audience would feel as if they were in the characters' shoes, the lack of depth and a clear conclusion may frustrate some viewers, just as the acting performances generally do very little to elevate the *The Void* from lovingly nostalgic mimicry to a truly great tribute. **LM** ★★★



SOUNDS PECULIAR

BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called 'the airwaves'.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore 'pirate' pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality 'spoken word' content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of 'legitimate' broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...

COFFEE
Grab a Cup!

Podcast: Coffee With Jeff
http://csicon.fm/cwj/
Host: Jeff Kelley
Episodes Count: 130+
Format: Single Voice Chat
Established: August 2014
Frequency: Fortnightly
Topics: History, mysteries, cult movies, weird happenings

After several false starts and different formats, *Coffee with Jeff* has settled into a regular home as part of the Csicon Network. Presented in a down-home, chatty style by Jeff Kelley, *Coffee with Jeff* is a 'true' storytelling podcast presented as a less-than-30-minute amusement to be taken with a Sunday morning java. Kelley himself admits to getting most of his 'facts' from the Internet – so, as he notes resignedly, "I may have got some things wrong". To the best of his abilities, Jeff sifts through the available sources and presents his take on stories weird and wonderful, but mostly true-ish.

He has been working at the podcast thing for a few years and seems to have finally settled into a laid-back, folksy style as the most natural way to tell the often 'tall tales' that he's interested in.

Kelley lives in a northern suburb of Chicago, where he works as a production designer, but he also has an active sideline in amateur filmmaking for which he writes his own stories and scripts. Home-brewed beer is another passion, as is playing the guitar and enjoying old movies. An interest in history and a love of storytelling came together and found their natural outlet in the form of a podcast – and so *Coffee with Jeff* was born.

Not every instalment is strictly fortean – some are straight crime or human-interest stories – but the vast majority are of interest to FT readers. Recent topics include the 'ghost blimp' of 1942, the Jersey Devil, a three-part series on everyone's favourite reprobate Aleister Crowley, a two-part study of the infamous Patterson-Gimlin 'Bigfoot' film, the Bermuda triangle, the Cock Lane ghost, alien reptilians and the Dulce Base, and Spiritualism and the Fox Sisters. That's only skimming the surface of over 130 instalments.

Every now and then, Jeff also focuses on pop culture topics of fortean interest, such as oddball childhood toys like 'Silly Putty', the Magic-8 Ball, or the Slinky, or he offers an examination of the controversy over the origins of the game Monopoly, or the drawn-out fight over the inheritance of the notorious Sea Monkey fortune.

Movies often crop up, from a chat about the original 1954 *Godzilla* or discussion of such early Hollywood scandals as the trials of Roscoe Arbuckle and the death of Thelma Todd, to a two-part deep dive into 'The Celluloid of the Strange and Unusual'. Other unusual true-life stories are recounted, such as the crop circle making exploits of Doug and Dave, or the ill-fated Heaven's Gate cult and its members eventual mass suicide.

The three-part Aleister Crowley series from September 2016 (episodes 104 to 106) is a prime example of Jeff engaging with forteana. He comes at Crowley as an all-round figure, taking in other aspects of his life (mountaineering, poetry) rather than just the occult, and he comes clean as being someone who initially knew little about the man apart from the popular caricature of Crowley as 'the Great Beast' and 'wickedest man in the world'.

He begins by getting the pronunciation of Crowley's name right (always a good start), then expresses his own surprise that there is so much to say about the man that it'll likely take a podcast trilogy to do him justice. "Even if I do three parts, I'll only be scratching the surface," admits Jeff. He also engages with how finding the definitive 'truth' about the real man at this far a remove is virtually impossible, and in his own idiosyncratic manner tells Crowley's story. Intercut with Jeff's own narration are some archive audio snippets of Crowley, making good use of the podcast medium; you might think of It as a fun aural equivalent of Hunt Emerson's comic-strip biography in this issue of *FT*.

Each story on *Coffee with Jeff* is usually done and dusted within 20 minutes, with some establishing chat, vintage old-time adverts and closing words bringing the whole thing in at just under half an hour – perfect for the coffee break evoked by the title (whether it's a Sunday morning or not).

Strengths: Jeff's welcoming, personal style makes his podcast a regular treat.

Weaknesses: Sometimes the chat away from the main story can be inconsequential, and then there's that terrible theme song; sorry, Jeff...

Recommended Episodes: Ep14: Joseph Merrick (the story of the 'elephant man'); Ep19 The Fiji Mermaid; Ep21 The Cottingley Fairies; Ep23 William Mumler and Spirit Photography; Ep31 Claude Vorilhon and the Elohim; Ep53 The Philadelphia Experiment; Ep66 The Rendlesham Forest Incident; Ep103 The Dungeons and Dragons Controversy

Verdict: Something of an acquired taste, but once you're on Jeff's laid-back wavelength, there is much here to enjoy.

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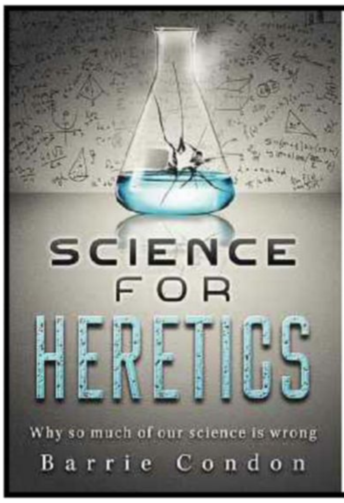
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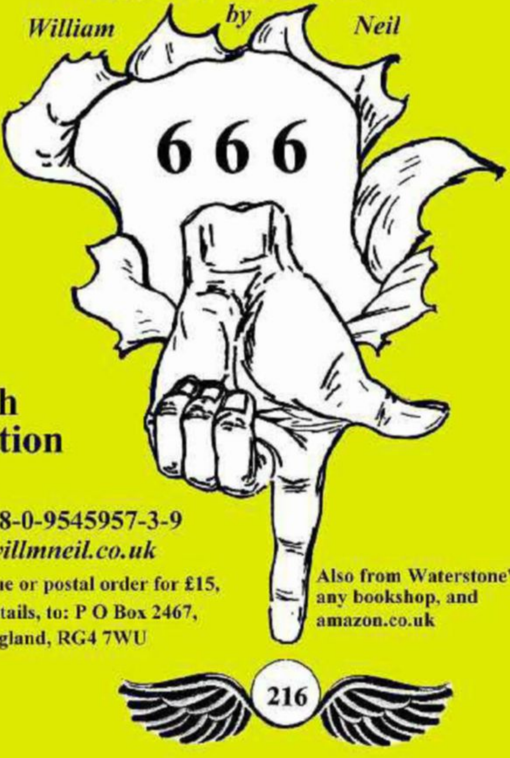

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Symbolic chelonian

When but a novice reader of Shakespeare, I remember a slight pang of disappointment at discovering that the "Turtle" in the title of his great metaphysical poem on ideal love, "The Phœnix and the Turtle", referred to the turtle dove rather than the shelled chelonian. I suspect I had been hoping for some Lewis Carroll-style fantasy on mismatched animal partners. *Fortean Times*, however, has restored my faith in the inevitability of the surreal. The review of Joseph Nigg's book *The Phœnix* [**FT354:56**] refers to Shakespeare's poem as "The Phœnix and the Tortoise" which (unless there are tortoise doves out there) takes us well into the deliciously absurd territory of "The Walrus and the Carpenter" while adding a whole new level of arcane symbolism.

Gail-Nina Anderson
Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Devout djinn

In his review of *Elf Queens and Holy Friars* [**FT355:59**], Jeremy Harte points out that Islam accommodates belief in *djinn* while the Christian Church doesn't have room for fairies. This is because the Bible doesn't mention fairies, while the *Q'uran* mentions *djinn* in more than 40 verses, stating that some of them heard Muhammad recite the Holy Book and accepted the tenets of Islam. In other words: belief in *djinn* is part of the Muslim faith, and some *djinn* are Muslims themselves. [See **FT324:20-21** – Editor]

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

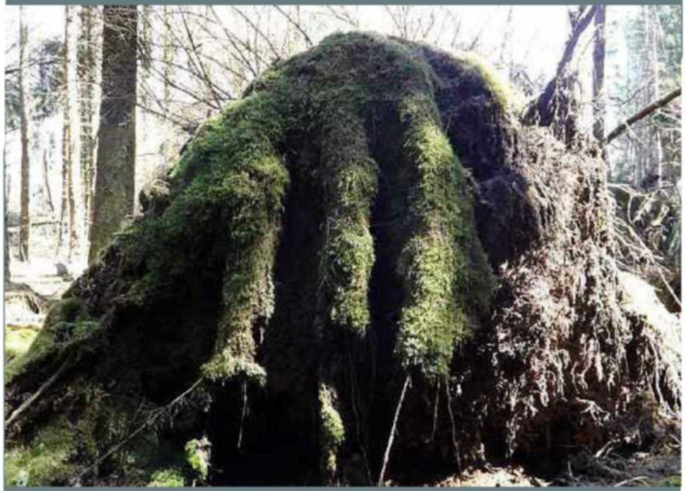
Our web-footed friends

I am no zoologist, but I did a double take when Mythconceptions [**FT351:21**] claimed that hippos have webbed feet (with a drawing of a web-footed hippo to boot). I'm pretty sure they don't. I should of course back up this assertion with references to the zoological literature, but I've had a lot to do lately. Instead, in true fortean fashion, I found the proof I needed at **FT308:42**: a clear and detailed picture of the infamous Loch Ness Hippo Ashtray. No trace of a web there.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Karl Shuker responds:
Hippos don't have 'true' webbed feet, in the sense that ducks and otters do, for instance, in which the webbing between the toes is permanently present and tight. What they have is extremely stretchy skin between the toes, so when the toes are splayed apart from each other, this stretchy skin tightens and thus yields an approximation of true webbing that helps them move underwater.

SIMULACRA CORNER



Cthulhu tree

On a walk in the woods near Drymen in Scotland, Colin Dalglish came across this uprooted tree that he thought bore a passing resemblance to Lovecraft's Cthulhu.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

Averted vision

Interesting what Bert Gray-Malkin says about things seen at the edge of our vision [**FT354:70**]. In astronomy there is a technique called averted vision. Basically, this involves not looking directly at faint objects but around the edge. Our eyes have rod and cone cells, the rod (or I may be confused with the cones!) see in black and white and are much more sensitive to faint objects. However, they are found around the eyes' edge, while the colour-seeing cones are in the centre. If you stare directly at say M51, a galaxy, with an underpowered instrument, in my case an 8x25 monocular, it's hard to see it – but stare around the edge and it pops into view.

Kevan Hubbard
Oxford

Opening the portals

Cryptozoologists should come to the realisation that the cryptids they have been chasing are a sneak preview of the End of the Age demons that will torment humanity during the Tribulation. The Book of Joel (Chapter 2) and the Book of Revelation describe these demons as 'locusts' but they are *not* grasshoppers! Over the years Satan has been gradually opening portals allowing these interdimensional denizens to come into our world. Old Testament prophet Enoch wrote about the Twelve Portals of the Earth, which mirror the Twelve Vile Vortices of the World described by Ivan T Sanderson in the 1950s.

Daniel Mastral is a former Satanist who renounced the occult to embrace Christianity. In his book, *Traces of the Occult*, the Brazilian author claims there are altogether 90 portals or entrances to Hell and, as of 2001, 72 of them have been opened. Examples of these portals include Mt Shasta in the Pacific Northwest, Ben MacDhui in Scotland, Sedona, Arizona, and the Bermuda Triangle – to name just a few. The remaining portals will be opened when the CERN scientists turn the key, releasing the fallen angels from their gloomy dungeons of Tartarus, where God sent them to await Judgment Day. This is foretold in the ninth chapter of the Book of Revelation when demons rise from the Abyss like "smoke pouring from a great furnace" and rising with them is the king of the underworld – Apollyon. The CERN Project is located at the site where the ancient Celts built a temple to the god Apollo, believing it was a portal or gateway to Hades.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Insect trophies

Regarding the report and letter about Asian hornets [**FT353:10, 355:73**], I would like to relate an experience I had in Oxford: in the early 1970s before Cornmarket Street was pedestrianised, I was waiting for a bus when I heard a loud buzzing and looked down. On the pavement by my feet was a wasp wrestling with a crane fly. As they rolled about, the wasp cut off the crane fly's wings, legs and then its head, which it flew off with. This made quite an impression on me and for some time I tried unsuccessfully to find out whether this was common practice among wasps.

Laurence Stockdale
By email

Crash dynamics

While Judy Owen's story [**FT354:20**] is indeed a remarkable one, I must point out that, given she was struck from behind, slowing down actually made the incident worse than it might have been if she had been travelling at her original speed.

Christopher Dean
Redbridge, Essex

LETTERS

The Haunted Generation

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Bob Fischer's article "The Haunted Generation" [**FT354:30-37**] was intriguing – but although the move to the digital world kicked in from the early 1980s, children had been escaping into dreamscapes and soundscapes created for them in the analogue world for many years previously.

As a child in the early 1960s, I found *Noggin the Nog* exerted a strong, and lasting, fascination. The techniques used in this programme included a calm, unassuming narrative that gave factual accounts of fantastic adventures in a strange land long ago, backed up with very accurate historical drawings and peculiar music from Vernon Elliott. The use of the bassoon, with its rather strange timbre, for the music, and the sparse setting, added to the strangeness. Watching it was like entering a private world with a door closing behind you, and all adults excluded.

It terms of general spookiness, though, the 1968 BBC Radio adaptation of *The Hobbit* would take some beating. This was broadcast on dark autumn Sunday evenings as an adult drama and was done in the style of a grotesque middle European fairy tale, or Norse saga, by a cast led by Paul Daneman. It had music by David Munrow and BBC Radiophonic Workshop and had a very different tone to the kind of 'feel good' slightly comic approach adopted in later, better known, adaptations of Tolkien's works. (Though now regarded as no more than a footnote, the series made such an impact at the time that John Boorman immediately hired Munrow for a feature film adaptation of *The Lord of The Rings*, to be done in the same style. Alas, despite much preparation in 1968-1969, this came to nothing when Universal Studios, who would have produced it, dramatically scaled back their funding for UK productions).

But is this really just to do with what we recollect from our childhood, or is the nature of memory conditioned by changes in technology? It is intriguing to consider that the textures provided by analogue recording and its broadcasting techniques created an atmosphere that we vividly remember now because it is distinctly different from our experience of the modern world. Once analogue fades away completely and we have nothing but CGI and computer game-type presentations, will our memories of today be different in 40 years' time from our memories of 40 years ago now?

Simon Matthews
Gateshead, Tyne and Wear

Reading *The Haunted Generation* proved to be something of a cathartic experience. At last someone has been able to articulate why the 1970s has always provoked a sense of disquiet like a repressed memory of some family tragedy.

Having been born in 1966, the 1970s were my formative years, yet the decade seems to have been reduced to clip-show fodder of easy identifiable references – Spangles, Glam Rock and Chopper bikes. That's not how I remember it.

I grew up in the early part of the decade in the industrial North against a backdrop of cooling towers and a glow on the horizon from the local steelworks that could be seen from the landing window at night. At the end of the main road was a council park bordered on two sides by light industrial units and a stretch of wasteland where people abandoned cars and the local crisp manufacturer dumped huge cardboard drums of out-of-date produce. On the other side was the supposedly haunted Clarkie's Wood – the eponymous Clarkie having hanged himself from a tree in the wood itself. The shift from modernity to folklore was a question of feet, yet was real and palpable.

In the next street were a family in which all the boys suffered a genetic deformity – they were born without middle fingers or ring fingers on both hands and I would watch them outside the local hardware shop that sold Esso Blue paraffin eating apples held quite dextrously between the remaining fingers. Around the corner were a family who had newspapers covering their windows rather than curtains and there were stories of the daughter having been disfigured in a fire so that she never went out during daylight hours.

When I think of it now, much of the geography of my childhood does seem elusive and half remembered – tower blocks and new motorways always figure heavily even though I grew up in a semi-detached and we never had a car. Is this just autosuggestion provoked by *Mary, Mungo and Midge*, or the same Public Information films that promoted the idea that everything seemed designed or destined to kill – electricity substations, beaches, railway lines, building sites, strangers and most memorably farms? The grand guignol of 'Apaches' still haunts me to this day. When a quiet day out seemed likely to end up in dismemberment, electrocution or being kidnapped, it's a wonder my generation ever went outdoors! Even the children's programmes seemed to underline this feeling of disquiet – *The Boy From Space* seemed like a refugee from SHADO, *Children of the Stones* was truly creepy with its hint of something ancient and unseen while *Animal Kwackers* was just bizarre fodder for teatime TV.

We moved to the South of England in the mid 1970s and my memories from this new location are not as resonant or as haunted (though I still maintain having seen and heard some questionable things in the new flat where we lived). The 1970s officially ended for me in the upper balcony of our local Odeon when I watched an Imperial Star Destroyer attempt to catch the fleeing consular ship holding Princess Leia – but the decade never really went away.

Jonny Trunk's point about leaving things half-remembered is a valid one – I have since tracked down programmes from this era only to be disappointed by how they appear now to my adult mind (apart from Ivor the Engine, which to this day fills me with a warm comforting pastoral glow). Maybe having a sense of disquiet in your life needn't automatically be a negative thing.

Richard Carey
Pinner, Middlesex

Bob Fischer's article on the generation that grew up in the 1970s certainly produced many smiles and shudders of recognition from me, as I'm sure it did from many.

(Toni Arthur! God, I was terrified of her! She made my infant self want to run screaming into the arms of Chloe Ashcroft). Perhaps, for me, the defining image of the era comes at the end of the play *Robin Redbreast*, when the heroine looks back at the murderous villagers and sees them transformed into pagans from the past, complete with stags' antlers.

The past was still there, haunting the present and the future was going to be pretty weird too. Bob Fischer's interviewees were in agreement about when all this ended – sometime in the early to mid-Eighties – but were less sure about when it began. I would argue that this was because it was all a continuation of what had been going on in our culture for centuries, with the spread of television adding another dimension. Think of all those M R James adaptations (in typical 1970s no-holds-barred style) that appeared at Christmas – and was there ever a writer more concerned with a nation's history haunting its present than James? Britain was a country with a living history and a big respect for the uncanny and we viewed the future with the same mixture of anticipation and terror.

Perhaps the stranger puzzle is why it ended. Richard Littler talks of the culture turning to money and that may be a big part of it. The conflicting voices of religion, history and science were all sidelined in favour of the dead whine of economics by 1985 and that has gone on to this day. In the 1970s, hauntings and monster sightings could appear as news items; today the news programmes whitter endlessly about "GDP" and "economic growth" as if they were real things, which they are not. It could be that we are so haunted by our childhoods because we were the last to experience that connection with our cultural past, which every generation before us had taken for granted. Today, it is impossible to believe we are watched over by figures from the past when we fail to believe that they could even have existed, walking where the retail parks and endless housing estates now squat.

One of the many sad aspects of the recent Brexit catastrophe was the sight of people claiming to defend British culture when they have none. It's gone. We've lost it… or, at least, our mainstream culture has lost it. We have gone from being an island full of mystery and weirdness to being a prosaic, materialistic place with no weirdness in it all and that, paradoxically, is a very weird situation indeed.

Albert Ravey
Ramsey, Isle of Man

Like Bob Fischer I was born in 1973 and have always had a sense of a 'now' just out of reach. This seems deeper than simple childhood nostalgia and was reflected in the children's TV, information films and books of that time, which were more than happy to incorporate horror, the strange and the other for a child audience. The *Picture Box* opening titles (below), which the article references, seem the most distilled form of this, encapsulating the sense of 'hauntology'. I would also mention *The Box of Delight* that ran on BBC in 1984, particularly the eerie title sequence.

Likewise the beginning of *The Book Tower* from Yorkshire Television, which began in 1979. It wasn't enough just to do a programme of children's book reviews; the opening titles place it in a strange isolated tower with suggestively spooky theme tune (a Lloyd-Webber adaptation of Paganini's 24th Caprice apparently). In this tower is none other than Tom Baker, Doctor Who to children of that age, sitting alone, spooning impossible amounts of sugar into a cup of tea.

Also bubbling up through the hauntology was 'The Boy From Space' on *Look and Read* in 1980. My own 'white whale' is a song about a witch, which I recall being broadcast on a children's TV programme, possibly *Words and Pictures* on Hallowe'en in the late 1970s. It contained the refrain "a witch on a broomstick, she flies by, eee-addi-addi-eee is her cry". As Fischer points out, we are probably the last generation to have such lost shades only available through our memories.

Daniel Clay
Hightown, Liverpool

I'd like to express how moved I was by the terrific *Haunted Generation* feature and would like to share my experiences as a child in the early Eighties. I was *really* haunted by my dreams as a child to the extent that I was taken to a GP several times because my parents didn't know how to cope with my inability to separate dreams from reality. No matter how often they told me "it was just a dream" I couldn't get over the dreams in the daytime. I now realise that a massive part of the problem was the public information films, television and literature I was privy to, including two spectacular errors of judgement (in my opinion) by my school.

Around 1982, when I was six or seven, our teacher gave us a pamphlet in a sealed envelope to take home to our parents. Obviously, the whole class opened these envelopes before they went home (including me). I don't remember the reaction of my school friends, but I was absolutely stricken with fear. It was a pamphlet about accidents in the home with graphic pictures of children who had been injured in some way. I remember being upset by the imagery, but my mum brushed it off and said: "Serves you right for opening it!" To be fair, perhaps it was because of that pamphlet that I never tipped scolding water on myself or choked myself with a skipping rope, but there was more to come.

PICTURE
BOX

A few years later we were shown a hideous 'stranger danger' video starring the wonderful Duncan Preston. The stranger (Preston) kidnaps a girl with the old "Do you want to see some puppies?" line. You are shown two scenarios, one of the girl going off with the stranger, and one where she doesn't go. The former scenario haunts me to this day. I can see the girl now as she describes her entrapment to her mum after she is found. Like the pamphlets, it did the trick, but I don't think it needed to be quite so disturbing. I watched it again recently on YouTube and it still made feel weird – and every time I see Duncan Preston I can only think of the despicable man he played in that film. In later years he was one of Victoria Wood's right-hand men and continued to be so throughout her career.

Then there was children's television – where to begin? Never mind the obvious weirdness of *Bagpuss* – what about *The Children of Green Knowe*? *The Moondial*? *Running Scared*? *BOD*? *The Box of Delights*? And the most terrifying of all: *Chocky*. What the blinking hell was Chocky? I never watched an entire episode and I never will. I often felt very alone in my unease at these scary 'made for kids' films and TV shows and I don't recall any of my friends being as sensitive as me, so to read that others were as disturbed by it all is quite frankly a tremendous relief. Finally, somebody gets it!

Joanne Ross
London

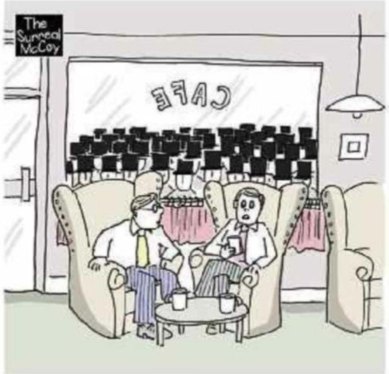
LETTERS

The Haunted Generation very much struck a chord, describing as it did some of my own childhood experiences (I'm 43 years old). In addition to his examples, I might add one other piece of 1970s drama: Nepenthe's wonderful re-telling of Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (where a big black farm dog behaves in accordance with its true nature regarding cute bunnies, shotgun pellets require skilled removal and multitudes are gassed.)

I first watched it aged about five, and the film left me with a deep and long-lasting feeling of awe, and I think an accurate impression of the 'redness in tooth and claw' of nature, but also an enduring sense of wonder. It was the root of my now decades-old passion for tales of Black Shuck and his shaggy kindred, another legacy of that bloody-jawed hound by the tree trunk. Twenty-first century kids that I know who've seen it appear to be universally horrified.

Arthur Burton
By email

Bob Fischer's musings on the weirdness and unease of 1970s television etc. certainly resonated with me. I vividly remember scary children's dramas such as *The Owl Service* and *Children of the Stones*. The still from the school's broadcast *Picture Box* brought back memories of episodes that stick in my mind today. I also grew up in the 70s on a diet of reading Pan Horror Stories and books on ghosts for kids with very scary covers.



"I have several thousand Luddites following me on Twitter."

I recently talked to my husband about how weird "Music and Movement" sessions were in schools – something mentioned by Mr Fischer. I agree that the distinctive music of the age played an important part in this "aura of weirdness". Would *Children of the Stones* seem quite as unsettling without the accompaniment of unearthly voices and haunting soundscapes?

Sue Hardiman
Bristol

Thanks to Bob Fischer for articulating so well what I have been thinking for decades.

It's impossible to explain to those who did not live through the 1970s, but they had a strange 'feel' to them. I remember the long, hot school holidays that seemed to last forever, when every abandoned house was haunted and every water-filled quarry (in spite of the warnings of the Spirit of Dark and Lonely Water) hid a monster. It was as if an M R James story had been updated to the present and somehow leaked out into reality, infecting everything it touched.

Television of the era seemed to reflect this. *Doctor Who* was at its zenith, weird, scary, and owing more to horror than to hard science fiction. It was a show of brooding, sinister factories, blasted heaths, darkened woods and ancient caves; it featured giant green maggots crawling from Welsh slag heaps, intelligent marine dinosaurs rising up from the sea, giant man-eating rats gnawing off people's legs in Victorian sewers, animated killer dolls smashing out of shop windows, vampiric standing stones draining the life from hapless campers and a homicidal cyborg ventriloquist's dummy with the brain of a pig!

Childrens' telly was equally eerie, with the bedraggled Hartley Hare (above) in the distinctly odd *Pipkins*, the weird Victoriana of *Bagpuss* and the creepy title music of *Simon in The Land in Chalk Drawings*. And beyond this, the strangeness also seeped into 'normal' programmes. *Play for Today* often featured supernatural and fortean subjects; and sometimes they even made the news, as when *Nationwide* did a piece on the werewolf sightings in Hexham.

In the 1970s, it seemed that you just might see a ghost on an evening walk, a monster in a lake or a strange silver disc in a field. Somehow, the boundaries between realities seemed thinner, I don't know how or why, and I find myself longing for those days.

Richard Freeeman
By email

Actually, I think the haunted generation probably lasted till the late 1980s, as I recall being terrified by many public information films as a youngster at that time. Probably the scariest for me was the one with the child pulling down the hot iron by the cord. A couple of years back, I heard a nuclear safety ad in an old bunker in Scotland, which had a pretty sinister electronic backing. I was also a fan of the NFL, and a lot of their films used some pretty ominous-sounding library music: tunes by Tony Hymas and Alan Hawkshaw.

John Wilding
Hessle, Yorkshire

Feathered fiend

In her article on the so-called 'feathered fiend of Lincoln's Inn' ['A Winged Malevolence', **FT353:30-33**], Nina Antonia is mistaken in claiming that she is the first person to disclose the address of the haunted house at No 8 New Square. This honour belongs to my old friend the late Richard Whittington-Egan, author of a biography of Lionel Johnson (*Lionel Johnson: Dark Victorian Angel*, Capella Archive, 2012). Richard quoted the *Daily Mail* article at length, and reproduced a photograph of 8 New Square. He found it likely, but not proven, that the *Mail* article referred to Lionel Johnson's lodgings, from which he was driven out by the spectral bird. Richard contacted the SPR, which denied having any file on the haunting. He told me that he knew about the later discussion of the case in *50 Great Ghost Stories*, although this is a work of fiction with abundant invented dialogue.

As for Charles Appleby and John Radlett, the two alleged later victims of the 'winged malevolence', they would appear to share the predicament of the Urban Spaceman in that neither of them existed: no newspaper reported their demise, and genealogical records do not indicate that individuals by these names expired anywhere near London at the relevant time.

Jan Bondeson
Dunbar, Scotland

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Move aside!

Travelling from Australia in 1980, my girlfriend Dianne and I bought a campervan to tour Britain. Setting off to explore the southwest, we headed towards Portsmouth on the A3. In the late afternoon we turned onto minor roads to search for a camping spot, eventually discovering an area of dense woodland. A clearing allowed me to reverse the van into what appeared to be a disused track that led into the forest. Tucked between thick bushes and surrounded by massive trees, we were hidden from any passing traffic. Once the tasks of roof-raising and table-setting were completed I explored the vicinity while Dianne prepared a meal.

Having walked across to the far side of the clearing, I stopped and looked back toward the van, suddenly feeling uneasy. A sharp rustling from behind startled me. I jerked around toward the forest only to see a man walking his dog, perhaps 30 metres away. For me to be so on edge was bizarre and completely out of character. The man disappeared into the foliage without apparently seeing me. I began to enter the woods but again felt compelled to look back to the van. I slowly turned on the spot, scanning, trying to peer through the trees, for I had a distinct sensation that someone or something was watching me. I simply couldn't walk any further nor did I want to. I returned to the van and thought it best not to mention my experience. While we ate dinner we heard the echo of laughing children as they walked along the adjacent road, but due to the thick bushes we saw no one.

The sun set as we washed the dishes, and the only light in the forest was the soft glow from the van. We sat silently reading with the curtains drawn. Dianne put down her book and started fiddling with the curtains behind her head, then reached for safety pins to join them together. I thought it strange as she had never bothered with this before, but I said nothing. She then lay down to read rather than remain seated upright. It was now getting on for 11pm and the wind began to increase substantially, raking the bushes against the windows. High above us the treetops whistled in the wind.

We were then shaken by a distant muffled thud, followed by another slightly closer, then another, each one louder than the last. We sat motionless, hardly daring to breathe. They were unmistakable footsteps on the path, heading toward the rear of the van. I heard the crunch of ground foliage, branches being snapped and pushed aside. Deliberate powerful footsteps. My eyes were now glued to the rear doors when it suddenly dawned on me that we were blocking the path's entrance into the clearing. The scratching on the windows became more violent with each closing footstep. The noise now almost deafening, I felt a palpable presence building all around us when the next massive crunch was a solid half-step at the rear of the van. The noise and the scratching wind all evaporated with the final step, leaving us staring at each other, not daring to break the stillness with any word or movement.

Whatever was standing silently outside was also *inside* the van and I felt it meant us harm. As I grabbed a torch and went for the rear door Dianne blurted "Don't go out there." I hesitated with one hand on the handle then flung open the doors and jumped out flashing the torch in every direction, but there was nothing. I levelled the light along the track, straining to spot any movement, then tried to look through the bushes on either side, but it was impossible to see anything. I looked up to the stars, just making out the moving silhouettes of the top branches, then knelt down to shine the torch under the van, and finally turned the light one full circle.

That last ominous half-step had stopped right where I was standing. There was nothing to be seen but I could feel it. I stepped back inside the van, locked the doors and sat down. It was with us. I looked over to Dianne still huddled far away from the door. "Let's get out of here," she said. I clambered into the driver's seat and pulled the curtains from the front windows, half expecting some ghoulish face to confront me. The engine mercifully sparked into life with the first turn of the key. I turned on the headlights, jammed it into gear and skidded into the clearing and then onto the minor road. As I accelerated I could still feel it inside the van, but it was being sucked out as though it was hanging on, trying to drag us back. Changing gears to speed up I watched in the mirror the darkness swallowing the road and with every second the 'magnetic pull' lessened until I felt the van finally released from its grip.

After about 10 minutes we came to a small village. With the hour close to midnight the streets were deserted, but there was a large empty car park where I pulled in and stopped under the glare of a light. I turned off the engine and clambered back into the sitting area to put the kettle on for a cup of strong coffee. Dianne had not moved; still huddled in the long seat by the table she seemed to be in a state of mild shock.

I now felt safe under the light with the curtains open to an uninterrupted view toward the main street about 50m to our left. Sipping hot coffee and puffing a much-needed cigarette I was the first to speak, asking Dianne what she thought it was. It was only then that I told her of my anxiety when I walked to the edge of the clearing unable to move away from the sight of the van. She admitted she had also felt peculiar but much later, after we had eaten. When asked about her fiddling with the curtains she said that she felt that there was someone outside peering at her, hence the safety pins to close the gap.

Over the next hour we went over the events together. Before I described my experience I asked her to detail everything that she had heard and felt. She recounted the scratching on the side windows, the first distant footsteps from down the path, then the strengthening wind with each closer thud until they stopped by the van. She then said, with no prompting from me, that she had felt the thing inside the van. Her explanation was that although the physical body was standing silently in the darkness, its suffocating presence had overflowed inside. When asked about our escape she confirmed that although she didn't sense the van being restrained as I had, she felt that it had not completely left us until quite a distance from the woodland.

The next morning we drove on to Portsmouth. Foolishly I didn't retrace our movements the following day to record the location of the woodland, nor did I take note of the name of that safe little village. When I returned to England in 1988 I hired a car and drove along many of the minor roads between Guildford and Portsmouth looking in vain for that woodland and the village. I have my own theory about that night: we were blocking the pathway used for a regular journey by some energy, let's call it a ghost, and because we were an obstruction it needed to move us before continuing.

David Colwell
Adelaide, Australia
Abridged from his E Book*, The Invincible Twenty Seventh and other True Stories.*

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Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 1 SEPTEMBER 2017. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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WHY FORTEAN?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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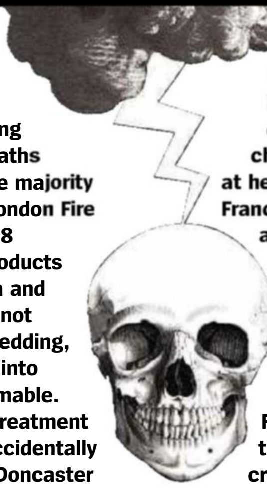
FORTEAN TIMES 358

ON SALE 14 SEPT 2017

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Data from just six fire brigades have revealed that skin creams containing paraffin have led to 37 deaths in England since 2010. The majority of cases came from the London Fire Brigade, which reported 28 fatalities. If people use products for conditions like eczema and psoriasis regularly but do not often change clothes or bedding, paraffin residue can soak into the fabric, making it flammable. Philip Hoe, 60, receiving treatment for psoriasis, died after accidentally setting himself on fire at Doncaster Royal Infirmary in 2006 when sparks from a cigarette reacted with the emollient cream he was covered in. Christopher Holyoake, 63, died in Leicester in 2015 when the flame from his cigarette lighter came into contact with the bedding covered in residue from an over-the-counter dermatological cream called E45. Also in 2015, John Hills, 84, died in Worthing, West Sussex, after setting himself on fire with his pipe. A paraffin-based cream called Cetraben had soaked into his clothes. *BBC News, 19 Mar; Metro, 20 Mar 2017.*

Head Constable Rajendra Jatava was celebrating the Hindu festival of Holi when he accidentally shot himself in the head. A video filmed in Shivpuri district, northern India, allegedly shows him shooting his revolver twice in the air on 14 March. He then tried to shoot a third time but the gun jammed. Constable Jatava, reportedly under the influence of alcohol, then accidentally shot himself while trying to fix his gun. He was immediately rushed to hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. *metro.co.uk, 18 Mar 2017.*

José Ignacio G, 23, was acting out the Gospel scene when Judas Iscariot hangs himself from a tree after betraying Christ. He had a wire around his neck and lost his footing during the Stations of the Cross ceremony in Barranquillas, Mexico. Onlookers tried to revive him, but he died on the way to hospital. *Metro, 18 April 2017.*

Philip Shard, 60, of Rushmere St Andrew in Suffolk was struck by lightning on 27 May while clutching a golf club at the Fynn Valley Golf Club at Witnesham. He was resuscitated and taken to Ipswich Hospital in a critical condition, and died four days later. He had only become a member of the club a couple of months earlier. *BBC News, 3 June; Sun, 6 June 2017.*

On 18 June, Rebecca Burger was killed by an exploding whipped cream dispenser that hit her chest, causing cardiac arrest at her home in Mulhouse, eastern France. Although she received medical attention, she could not be saved. The 33-year-old lifestyle blogger was well known in France, with some 55,000 Facebook fans and 154,000 followers on Instagram. Less than two weeks later, Heuidi Dumotier, another Frenchwoman, was injured in the leg by another exploding cream dispenser. A whipped cream dispenser works by injecting gas into a metal container, keeping the entire dispenser under high pressure. One French consumer group has warned readers for years about faulty connectors on the gas capsules, causing them to break and expel at high speed. The injuries caused range from broken teeth and tinnitus to multiple fractures and, in one case, the loss of an eye. *BBC News, Sky News, 22 June 2017.*

A student nurse in Colombia survived a fall from the sixth floor of a hospital in the city of Cali after landing on top of a doctor. The doctor, however, was not so lucky. Isabel Muñoz, who was studying at University Hospital del Valle, died from her injuries. She was walking across a courtyard on her way to the cafeteria at around 9am when Ms Gonzalez fell on her, causing traumatic brain injury. The nurse, Maria Isabel Gonzalez, suffered multiple fractures but was in a stable condition at the time of the report. It was not known what had caused her to fall. *BBC News, 16 June 2017.*

A large black bear killed a 16-year-old boy who was participating in a popular trail running race in Alaska between Anchorage and Girdwood on 18 June. Patrick Cooper of Anchorage texted his family to say he was being chased by a bear while descending the extremely steep terrain. The race director, who had been handing out awards, organised a search party of runners after he was shown the message. Officials shot the 250lb (113kg) bear in the face, but it survived and ran off. Wildlife and law enforcement officials were still searching for the bear, which they intended to kill if found. The very next day, a black bear mauled a mineworker to death at Pogo Mine near Fairbanks, Alaska, while another man was injured. *BBC News, 19 June, Eve. Standard, 20 June 2017.*

Writing – A Job with All Sorts of Opportunities for All Kinds of People

Louise Kennedy

Jacqueline Jaynes

Martin Read

by Phil Busby

Do you fancy a challenge? What about the chance to make some money, get VIP access to major sporting and cultural events, or free holidays abroad? How would you like to look in the mirror and say, "Yeah – I did it!"

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People have some funny ideas about writing. As a profession, it's not just for 'special' folk. Anyone can do it. If you love words, and stories, and you're not afraid of hard work, that's all you need.

For the last 27 years The Writers Bureau has been helping new writers get started in the business. Writers like Louise Kennedy, who struck gold when she started blogging about her life on a boat from the viewpoint of ... her cat. Baily Boat Cat was picked up by a major publisher and turned into a book which now sells world wide. "The Writers Bureau has given me the confidence to follow my dreams," Louise says. "My tutor was lovely, encouraging and offered me great constructive criticism."

> *"My tutor was lovely, encouraging and offered me great constructive criticism."*

Another WB student, Martin Read, wanted to keep active in his retirement and his writing led to a great little bonus. "As a result of my cricket articles, I have been elected into The Cricket Writers Club – an organisation that counts experienced journalists among its members. One of the perks of this membership is a press card that gives me entry into all of England's cricket stadium press boxes." And there are not many that get in there.

Then there's Jacqueline Jaynes, who just loves to travel: "The Writers Bureau course has done everything I hoped it would and more. There was a clear progression through chapters so that my writing skills and confidence grew steadily with feedback from my tutor. The market research activities were invaluable for opening up potential new avenues for publication."

Those new avenues led to a travel website where Jacqueline started writing short articles. Soon she was asked to join the team, and now she and her husband get expenses paid trips all over the world in exchange for reviews!

These are just some of the many inspirational true stories from Writers Bureau students. And there's no reason why you shouldn't join them. Who knows, this time next year I could be writing about your success. With a 15-day trial and money back guarantee, there's nothing to lose and potentially a whole new life to gain. So why not visit the website at www.writersbureau.com or call Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

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Walter Dinjos "I enrolled in The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing course in the hope of building my confidence as a writer and ending my cycle of publishing failures. I currently work as a content writer with a writing agency and have even won a writing competition."

Elise Jones "I was being encouraged by The Writers Bureau to send out my work. This I did. Having sent out seven pieces five of them have been published."

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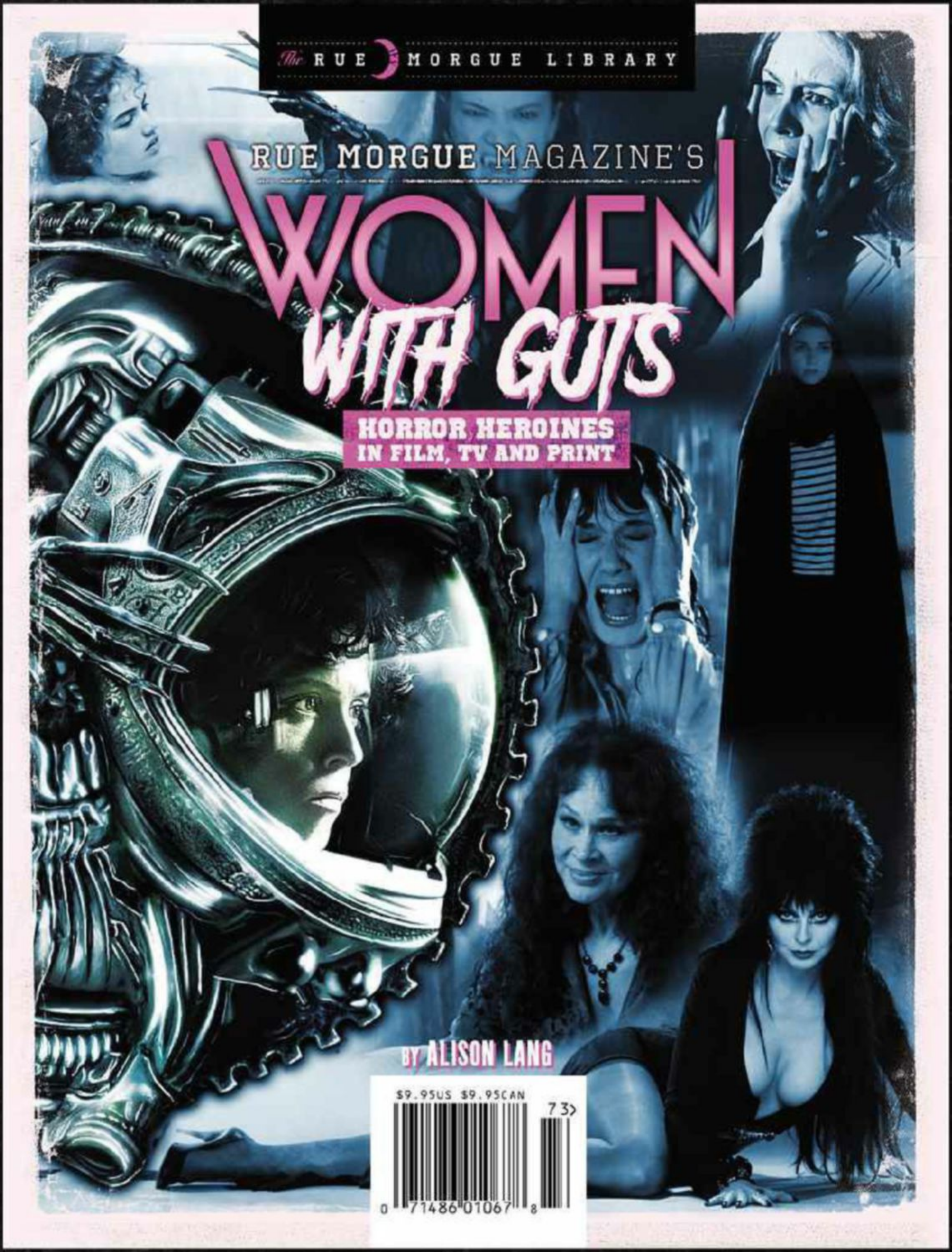

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